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THE CONTEST FOR KARS,
1914-1921

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The Strategic Position of Kars

The great fortress of Kars and its surrounding mountains and plains (historic Vanand) became a coveted prize in the seven-year contest, 1914-1921, between the Russian and Ottoman empires and then between the Republic of Armenia and the Turkish Nationalists headed by Mustafa Kemal Pasha. For the Russians and Armenians, Kars represented a strategic defensive bastion for the entire Caucasus region, as well as a staging ground for offensive operations westward toward the plains of Alashkert and Erzerum in the center of the great Armenian plateau. For the Turks, Kars was critical not only to protect the empire's eastern flank but also to serve as a valuable base for potential penetration into the Caucasus and beyond. Shortly after the Ottoman Empire entered World War I in the autumn of 1914, Minister of War Enver Pasha risked his reputation on an ill-fated campaign to break through from Erzerum to the strategic Sarikamish pass leading to Kars and Alexandropol (Gyumri), and once again, in the autumn of 1920, General Kiazim Karabekir would underscore the importance of capturing Kars for the triumph of the forces of the Turkish counter-government of the Grand National Assembly.

The Russian Empire had annexed the counties (*sanjaks*) of Kars, Ardahan, and Batum through its victory in the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-78. The Russians built up Kars by expanding its network of forts and introducing Russian military and civilian architectural styles. Kars and Ardahan were combined as the Kars *oblast'* and reorganized into the counties (*okrugs*) of Kars, Kaghisman (Armenian: Kaghzvan), Ardahan, and Olti. A little more than 7,000 square miles in area, the

oblast' was populated predominantly by Muslims on its annexation, but by the eve of World War I in 1914 the Christian element had attained a majority in the Kaghisman and Kars okrugs, the latter being the largest county with nearly half of the province's 400,000 inhabitants.¹

In 1915, Enver's failed Sarikamish campaign was followed by the genocidal operations of the Young Turk regime. Thousands of Western (Turkish) Armenian refugees and survivors straggled across the prewar frontier to Kars and beyond, creating a scene of great horror for the Eastern (Russian) Armenians. A year later in 1916, a Russian military offensive from Kars and Erevan and along the Black Sea coast led to the occupation of a broad expanse of Ottoman territory from Trebizond on the sea to Erzerum in Upper Armenia and onward to Van near the Russo-Persian frontier. The elated Armenian volunteer battalions that participated in those operations were unaware of the fact that imperial Russia had already sealed secret agreements with its Allied partners, Great Britain and France, whereby all this territory was marked for direct Russian annexation rather than the formation of an autonomous Armenian state or homeland under Russian auspices as many Armenians had been led to believe.²

The dual Russian revolutions and the onset of the Russian Civil War in 1917 were accompanied by the collapse of the Russian armies on the Caucasus front. As the Russian divisions abandoned their positions in the occupied eastern Ottoman provinces, the horrifying specter loomed for the Armenians of having to flee from these territories once again and having to face a Turkish offensive that would also threaten the very existence of the Eastern Armenian population. Armenian leaders tried to stem the tide of disaster by dispatching to the front a small army corps made up of Armenian units serving in the Russian imperial army, along with several Western Armenian volunteer battalions. It was

¹ A. Shakhmatuni, *Administrativnyi peredel Zakavkazskago kraia* [Administrative Division of the Transcaucasian Region] (Tiflis, 1918), pp. 72-73. For the Kars oblast' under Russian dominion, see A.M. Poghosyan, *Sotsial-tnesakan haraberutiunnere Karsi marzum, 1878-1920* [Social-Economic Relations in the Province of Kars, 1878-1920] (Erevan: Haypethrat, 1961); D.S. Zavriev, *K noveishei istorii severo-vostochnykh vilayetov Turtsii* [On the Recent History of the North-Eastern Vilayets of Turkey] (Tbilisi: Tbilisi State University, 1947).

² See Richard G. Hovannisian, "The Allies and Armenia, 1915-1918," *Journal of Contemporary History* 3 (Jan. 1968): 145-68; idem, *Armenia on the Road to Independence* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), pp. 247-54.

impossible, however, for a few thousand men to fill the void created by the flight of more than 100,000 Russian soldiers.

Turkish Occupation in 1918

While the Armenians attempted to prepare for the impending tidal wave of a renewed Turkish offensive, negotiations for peace between Soviet Russia, on the one hand, and Germany and its allies, including Turkey, on the other, were in progress. Lenin was determined to end Russia's participation in the world war at any price in order to save the "spark of the revolution." This strategy culminated in the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk on March 3, 1918, by which the Soviet government (Sovnarkom) not only ceded thousands of square miles of the most productive lands of the Russian Empire but also recognized the right of the Ottoman Empire to reoccupy the eastern provinces that had been captured by the Russian army. In addition, Soviet Russia agreed to cede the Kars and Batum oblasts and to do all in its power to dissolve the Armenian armed forces: "The Russian Republic assumes the responsibility to demobilize and dissolve the Armenian bands, composed of Russian and Turkish subjects, which are found in Russia as well in the occupied Turkish provinces, and will completely disperse these bands."³ The Sovnarkom assented to these terms even though it had no actual jurisdiction in the Caucasus region, where nearly all political parties had denounced the Bolshevik revolution and refused to recognize the legitimacy of the Soviet regime.

The Turkish military lost no time in effecting the rights gained at Brest-Litovsk. The small Armenian contingents were no match for the Ottoman divisions and retreated from Erzerum. By early April, all of the Western Armenian areas occupied by the Russian armies during the war had been retaken by the Turkish army, which now stood at the prewar boundary of 1914, poised to advance into Kars and Batum. A last-ditch attempt by the Armenians and Georgians to defend the two provinces dissipated as soon as the Turkish army marched into the stra-

³ For a history of the Brest-Litovsk proceedings and treaty, see John W. Wheeler-Bennett, *Brest-Litovsk: The Forgotten Peace, March 1918* (London: Macmillan, 1938); United States, Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States: Proceedings of the Brest-Litovsk Peace Conference* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1918). See also USSR, Ministerstvo Inostrannykh Del SSSR, *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR* [Documents on Foreign Policy of the USSR], vol. 1 (Moscow: Izd-vo politicheskoi literatury, 1957), pp. 199-200.

tegic port of Batum on April 14. The Turks then forced the provisional Transcaucasian legislative body in Tiflis, the Seim, to declare the region's complete separation from Russia and the formation of the independent Transcaucasian Federative Republic. The Turkish side demanded this in order to deal freely with the weak Transcaucasian side and advance even beyond the borders drawn in the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk.⁴

The Transcaucasian Federation, created on April 22, 1918, was headed by a Georgian, who even before submitting his cabinet for confirmation to the legislature, ordered the Armenian defenders to surrender Kars to the Turks. The Armenians were thrown into a dilemma. Their army corps under General Tovmas (Foma) Nazarbekian still held the great fortress, which according to military experts could stave off an offensive for at least two months. On the other hand, if the Armenians defied the Georgian-Muslim majority in the Seim, they would have to stand alone against the invaders. As it was, news of the order to surrender Kars spread rapidly, creating havoc and panic among both the military and civilian population. Within a few hours, thousands of Armenians were fleeing eastward toward Alexandropol in the province (*guberniia*) of Erevan. On April 25, 1918, the Turkish army marched into Kars and took possession of its network of forts and great military stockpiles.⁵

The Armenian tragedy did not end there, as the Turkish forces kept on advancing, breaching the Brest-Litovsk boundaries by crossing over the Akhurian/Arpachai River into the Erevan guberniia. They entered Alexandropol on May 15 and marched along the railway toward Karakilisa and Tiflis in one direction and toward Sardarabad and Erevan in the other. The German military was outraged that the Turks had violated the Brest-Litovsk boundaries rather than concentrating on the imperiled fronts in Palestine and the Balkans and that Enver Pasha was apparently intent on reaching Baku on the Caspian Sea and beyond. In order to contain Turkish expansion, the German strategists calculated that it was necessary to give Enver something in Transcaucasia, this coming at the expense of the Armenians in the Erevan guberniia, but they would deny the Turks the Georgian provinces by bringing that re-

⁴ Hovannisian, *Road to Independence*, pp. 121-59 *passim*.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 159-66; Archives of the Delegation of the Republic of Armenia to the Paris Peace Conference (cited hereafter as Rep. of Arm. Del. Archives), File 1/1; Gavriil Korganoff, *La participation des Arméniens à la guerre mondiale sur le front du Caucase, 1914-1918* (Paris: Massis, 1927), pp. 123-28, 137-56.

gion within the German sphere of influence. In secret negotiations, they urged the Georgian leaders to withdraw from the Transcaucasian Federation and declare Georgia's independence under German protection. That dramatic action occurred on May 26, 1918, followed by the proclamation of the Republic of Azerbaijan by Muslim leaders, thereby leaving the Armenians alone and face to face with the Turkish army.⁶ It was at that moment, at the end of May, when the hard-pressed Armenian armed forces made a desperate stand at Sardarabad and Bash-Abaran, successfully repelling the Turkish regiments, at least for the moment.

With Turkish armies deep within the Eastern Armenian provinces, the Armenian leaders had no choice but to sanction the independence of a still-undefined Armenian republic on May 28, 1918, and then sign an oppressive peace treaty in Batum a few days later on June 4. By that treaty, the Ottoman Empire regained control not only of all of Western Armenia and Kars and Ardahan but also of the railway and fertile Arax River Valley in the province of Erevan. The Armenian republic thus began its existence within a squeezed space between Erevan and Echmiadzin in the south and the basin of Lake Sevan in the north. Turkish artillery was installed just a few miles from Erevan, the provisional Armenian capital.⁷

For the next five months, the Armenian leaders toiled under humiliating conditions in efforts to persuade the Germans to force their Turkish allies to honor the Brest-Litovsk treaty and withdraw at least from the Arax Valley. At the same time, they urged the Turkish dictators to give Armenia a little breathing room for the sake of good neighborly relations. Such supplications achieved no positive results, and it was only the defeat of the Ottoman and German empires in late 1918 that afforded the small, isolated Armenian state that bit of breathing room.⁸ By the Mudros Armistice between the victorious Allied Powers and the Ottoman Empire on October 30, 1918, the Turkish army was required to withdraw within six weeks from all of the Caucasus, except for the Kars oblast' and a small adjoining part of the Batum oblast', and if so

⁶ For relevant documents, see [Republic of Georgia], *Dokumenty i materialy po vneshnei politike Zakavkaz'ia i Gruzii* [Documents and Materials on the Foreign Policy of Transcaucasia and Georgia] (Tiflis, 1919). On German-Turkish disagreements over the Caucasus, see Ulrich Trumpener, *Germany and the Ottoman Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), pp. 148-99.

⁷ Hovannisian, *Road to Independence*, pp. 191-98.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 216-38.

ordered from those districts as well. During the final days of 1918, nearly 50,000 Ottoman troops operating in the North Caucasus, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia, and North Persia streamed back into the provinces of Kars and Batum.⁹

When the Ottoman divisions evacuated the devastated Erevan guberniia in December 1918, most of the refugees from Kars crowded into the gateway city of Alexandropol, in anticipation of returning home at the first possible moment. Yet the Allies did not act with resolve, and the pitiful throng, having to pass the severe winter of 1918-19 under open skies, was decimated by starvation, complete exposure to freezing weather, and epidemics of typhus and cholera. The Turkish army still stood firm in Kars. Meanwhile, the chance that the Allies might allow the Ottoman Empire to retain control of the Kars and Batum oblast's vanished on November 11, when the Supreme Allied War Council ordered that the Ottoman army pull back behind the Russo-Turkish border of 1914.¹⁰ Rather than defy the command outright, the new cabinet that had replaced the Young Turk regime adopted delaying tactics and submitted repeated justifications for the Turkish forces to winter at Kars, claiming that a mass movement of troops across the snow-covered terrain would wreak extreme hardships on the men and subject the region to anarchy.

British, Armenians, and Muslims

The responsibility for supervising the Ottoman withdrawal from Kars fell to the British 27th Infantry Division, which disembarked at Batum in December of 1918 to occupy strategic points along the Transcaucasian railway system. The commanding officer, Major General G.T. Forestier-Walker, met with Armenian Foreign Minister Sirakan Tigranian at Alexandropol on January 6, 1919 to reveal plans to place the Kars

⁹ Frederick Maurice, *The Armistice of 1918* (London: Oxford University Press, 1943), pp. 85-87; H.W.V. Temperley, ed., *A History of the Peace Conference of Paris*, vol. 1 (London: H. Frowde, 1920), pp. 495-97; Gotthard Jäschke, "Die Südwestkaukasische Regierung von Kars," *Die Welt des Islams*, n.s., 2:1 (1952): 47. See also Sabahettin Selek, *Milli mücadele: Anadolu ihtilali* [The National Struggle: Anatolian Rebellion] (Istanbul, 1963), pp. 151, 155.

¹⁰ Great Britain, War Office (cited hereafter as WO), Class 106, vol. 64, 106/64, Execution of the Armistice with Turkey; Tevfik Bıyıklıoğlu, Mondros mütarekesesinde Elviye Selase ile ingili yeni vesikalar [New Documents Relating to the Three Sanjaks in the Mudros Armistice], *Belleten* 21 (Oct. 1957): 573-74.

oblast' under British military jurisdiction. Although rejecting an appeal to sanction Armenia's immediate expansion to the prewar Turkish frontier, Forestier-Walker did authorize the Armenian government to appoint the civil officials for the military governorship.¹¹ He then traveled to Kars on January 7 to inform the Turkish commander of these arrangements, according to which the Armenians would take control of the railway from Alexandropol to Kars on January 15 and, after the Turkish army's withdrawal from the entire province by January 25, of the railway from Kars to Sarikamish and onward to the prewar frontier. Since the civilian population faced a winter of famine, the Turkish armed forces would be permitted to keep only enough foodstuff to provide each soldier with one kilogram of grain per day for one month.¹²

Back in Alexandropol on January 8, Forestier-Walker signed a memorandum with Tigranian regarding the Armenian administrative role in the British military governorship. Pending action by the forthcoming Paris Peace Conference, all civil officials were to be appointed by the Armenian government, the Armenian army could form a small gendarmerie which would advance as the Turkish forces withdrew, and the rights of the local population had to be respected, for "the Muslim inhabitants of Kars are extremely apprehensive about the introduction of an Armenian administration." The willingness of Armenia to collaborate with the British military governor, the memorandum concluded, did not in any way compromise Armenia's claim to Kars or restrict its endeavors to gain a favorable ruling from the peace conference regarding the permanent status of the province.¹³

Soon after negotiating this provisional accord, Forestier-Walker assigned Colonel C.E. Temperley to serve as military governor, and the Armenian cabinet named Stepan Korganian, an official of the Kars oblast' under Russian rule, to head the civil administration.¹⁴ The sum of these arrangements made it seem that finally thousands of refugees would be able to return to their homes before winter's end. Starving Armenia would be slightly relieved of its burdens.

¹¹ United States National Archives (cited hereafter as US Archives), Record Group (RG) 256, 184.021/1; Rep. of Arm. Del. Archives, File 333.

¹² Great Britain, Foreign Office (cited hereafter as FO), 608/78, 341/1/6/3681; US Archives, RG 256, 184/021/2; Rep. of Arm. Del. Archives, File 8/8.

¹³ FO, 371/3669, 25335/25335/58; Rep. of Arm. Del. Archives, File 7/7.

¹⁴ WO 95/4890, 4th Battalion War Diary, and 95/4880, 27th Division Headquarters War Diary; Rep. of Arm. Del. Archives, File 7/7, Report of Jan 13, 1919.

While Armenia selected officials to administer the Kars oblast', the Muslim population of the province prepared for defiance. On January 17-18, 1919, more than a hundred leaders met to chart a course of united resistance. The conference resolved to reject both Armenian and Georgian authority and to establish an autonomous state, the South-West Caucasus Republic, which would assume authority over the broad expanse from Ajaria on the Black Sea to Nakhichevan and the Persian frontier and operate in keeping with the interests of the Ottoman Empire.¹⁵

When Colonel Temperley and a number of Armenian officials led by Korganian set out for Kars, hundreds of armed Muslims intercepted the party and threatened to open fire unless the Armenians returned to Alexandropol. Swayed by this show of force, Temperley ordered the Armenian officials to leave and, much to the dismay of the Armenian government, granted informal recognition to the local Muslim administration. Under these circumstances, the leaders of the South-West Caucasus Republic were willing to tolerate Temperley's presence in Kars.¹⁶ The military and political situation having thus balanced in favor of the local Muslims, the Turkish army complied with Forestier-Walker's orders and gradually withdrew from the province, taking care, however, to conceal large caches of arms and ammunition and to leave behind disguised cadre to direct and assist the Turko-Muslim population.¹⁷

The rebuff handed the Armenians proved particularly tragic to the refugees from Kars, some 60,000 of whom had congregated in Alexandropol awaiting permission to return home. They had prepared to move across the Akhurian River, only to find that they had to remain in Alexandropol without adequate food and shelter. On January 25, Prime Minister Hovhannes Kachaznuni pleaded with Forestier-Walker to rescind his directive prohibiting the repatriation to Kars and instead to uphold his original pledge to assist in the immediate return of the refugees. The British reversal, Kachaznuni complained, had placed his

¹⁵ Gotthard Jäschke, "Beiträge zur Geschichte des Kampfes der Türkei um ihre Unabhängigkeit," *Die Welt des Islams*, n.s., 5:1-2 (1957): 24, and "Die Südwestkaukasische Regierung," pp. 49-51.

¹⁶ See WO 95/4880 and 95/4890, War Diaries; US Archives, RG 256, 184.01602/23 and 867B.00/77; Rep. of Arm. Del. Archives, File 3/3, Foreign Minister to Aharonian, March 6, 1919.

¹⁷ US Archives, RG 59, 861.00/6583; WO 33/965, №. 3180, 3243, 3616, and WO 95/4880 and 95/4890, War Diaries.

government and his people in an untenable position, for it confined them to an area that had been completely looted and denuded by the Ottoman armies. At the end of the month, Kachaznuni informed the British authorities that the last reserves of food had been exhausted and that the hospitals and orphanages had received no bread for two days. Unless the grain at Kars was made available soon, the nation would face extinction. Despite the urgency of such appeals, the British military strategists followed a cautious policy, striving to avoid conflict with the Muslim partisans. Colonel Temperley opposed any further attempt to install Armenian administrators at Kars.¹⁸

Throughout February and March of 1919, the provisional government of South-West Caucasus Republic was unchallenged, eventually growing so brash as to ignore and even flout the directives of the British military governor. Linked ever more closely with the Ottoman Empire and the still-mobilized Turkish divisions just beyond the border, Muslim bands broke into the storehouses and carried away food and weapons and enlisted new recruits. On March 10, the British military governor wired 27th Division headquarters that the local Muslim legislative body (*shura*) had doggedly disobeyed instructions to drop the title South-West Caucasus Republic and to restrict its activities to the province of Kars. One of his staff officers added that "the shura is completely out of hand and cannot be compelled to obey British orders unless the British garrison in Kars is much increased."¹⁹

These and similar reports helped to persuade Major General W.M. Thomson (Forestier-Walker's replacement as 27th Division commander) that the Armenian army should be authorized to occupy the province with British military support. The numerous communications about the shura's seditious activities and Young Turk bent, together with the increasing defiance throughout Turkey, prompted General G.F. Milne, senior commander of all British armed forces between Constantinople and the Caspian Sea, to accept the recommendation and order its overthrow. On April 4, in keeping with this dramatic shift in policy, Thomson named General K.M. Davie as head of the military region of Erevan and Kars and instructed him to disperse the Muslim administra-

¹⁸ Rep. of Arm. Del. Archives, Files 8/8 and 9/9; A.M. Elchibekian, *Velikaia Oktjabr'skaia sotsialisticheskaia revoliutsiia i pobeda Sovetskoi vlasti v Armenii* [The October Socialist Revolution and the Victory of Soviet Order in Armenia] (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1957), pp. 256-58.

¹⁹ WO 95/4880 and 95/4890, War Diaries; US Archives, RG 59, 861.00/6583; Rep. of Arm. Del. Archives, File 3/3.

tion and transfer the Kars oblast' and the southern part of Erevan province (Sharur-Nakhichevan) to Armenian jurisdiction pending a final ruling by the Paris Peace Conference. Davie arrived in Kars on April 6 with his staff and four armored cars, followed by two Indian battalions and auxiliary units, which augmented the British garrison to some 2,500 men. In addition, the Armenian army concentrated 2,000 men in Alexandropol to be prepared to supervise the repatriation of the refugees.²⁰

In executing the new British strategy, General Thomson on April 10 issued a proclamation of dissolution of the South-West Caucasus administration. That same day, the British military governor in Kars disbanded the shura (which offered no resistance) and arrested ten of its leaders. That evening, following the arrival of Armenia's only armored train from Alexandropol, the British transported the captive Muslim notables to Tiflis, from where they were shipped to Constantinople and ultimately interned on the island of Malta. After an existence of three months, the South-West Caucasus Republic had collapsed. On the night of the overthrow, while Indian troops patrolled the city, town criers passed through the streets reading out the decree of dissolution.²¹

The Armenian Occupation in 1919

With the situation in Kars apparently well in hand, General Davie traveled the 50 miles to Alexandropol on April 17 to discuss the forthcoming Armenian repatriation with Acting Prime Minister Alexandre Khatisian. According to the plan they adopted, the refugee convoys would proceed from Alexandropol to Kars and from Kulp (Koghb) to Kaghisman. The main body of refugees, who were massed at Alexandropol, would advance by road and rail starting on April 21. Those whose villages lay between Alexandropol and Kars would follow the Armenian army on foot, parting company as they approached their homes. The inhabitants of the city of Kars would be transported by train, as would natives of towns and settlements as far as the Turkish frontier. From Kars, the latter group would fan out gradually, occupy-

²⁰ FO 371/3661, 31192/1015/58, and WO 95/4880 and 95/4994, War Diaries; Al. Khatisian, *Hayastani Hanrapetutian dsagumn u zargatsume* [The Origin and Development of the Republic of Armenia] (Athens: Nor Or, 1930), p. 132.

²¹ WO 33/966, № 4995, and WO 95/4880 and 4994, War Diaries; FO 608/78, 341/1/6/7050, and FO 371/3658, 80231/512/58.

ing the villages nearest the city and then pressing forward until the more remote hamlets had been attained. British detachments at Kaghisman, Sarikamish, and Merdenek would assist in the operation.²²

On April 19, Stepan Korganian arrived in Kars to begin his duties as governor general. Two days later, the Armenian 2,000-man column under General Harutiun Hovsepian (Ossipov) struck out from Alexandropol, followed by streams of refugees, some 50,000 of whom were repatriated the first month. Hovsepian's troops made their entry into Kars on April 24, having earned high praise for their discipline from the attached British officer. On April 28, 1919, Armenian detachments relieved the Gurkha and Sikh battalions standing guard over the forts and the city. Kars had been united with the Republic of Armenia.²³

The assumption of responsibility by the Armenian army was witnessed by General Thomson and General Milne, who then traveled to Erevan for consultations with Prime Minister Khatisian. The Armenian government, while most gratified by the extension of its authority to Kars, was nonetheless disquieted by the impending withdrawal of the British forces. During consultations on April 30, Khatisian urged that the battalions be kept in Kars for a few months longer, but Milne, stern in his refusal, revealed that they would depart in mid-May. The intervening two weeks, he maintained, would give ample time for Korganian's administration to get established. The Armenian refugees, Milne continued, must not under any circumstance advance beyond the prewar boundary into Turkish Armenia, for mobilized Ottoman divisions stood along the frontier, contrary to British orders, and a dangerous situation could easily be provoked. Adding a word of encouragement or perhaps exhortation, Milne expressed confidence that the Armenians would prove themselves capable administrators. This belief, he stated, had prompted him to sanction Armenia's expansion into almost the entire Kars oblast'.²⁴

All British contingents had been withdrawn from Kars by the middle of May, with only a small military mission headed by Captain H.R. Prosser remaining as the initially hesitant Armenian government as-

²² WO 95/4894, War Diary, April, 1919.

²³ Rep. of Arm. Del. Archives, File 3/3, Foreign Minister to Aharonian, May 6, 1919; WO 95/4894, War Diary; US Archives, RG 256, 184.01602/28 and 867.4016/16.

²⁴ Rep. of Arm. Del. Archives, File 8/8, Stenographic notes. See also WO 95/4880, War Diary.

sumed both civil and military responsibility for the province. Armenian troops advanced southward into Kaghisman, southwestward into Sarikamish, northwestward into Merdenek, and northward as far as the Kur River in Ardahan. This seemingly favorable turn of events was crowned on May 10 when Khatisian and General Davie rode through the city of Kars in a military parade. The next day, Sunday, they attended thanksgiving services in the historic Church of the Holy Apostles, where Khatisian declared optimistically that the Armenian army would soon be in the plain of Alashkert, just beyond the old Russo-Turkish border.²⁵

The Kars oblast' had been restored to Armenia, but Armenia was not yet its master. Kurdish notables and Turkish soldiers—*aghas*, *beys*, and *askers*—continued to dominate many outlying districts. Armenian garrisons stood at Sarikamish, Kaghisman, Merdenek, and several other towns, but these could be likened to frontier outposts. Turkish agents roved freely between Olti and Sarikamish, maintaining liaison with the nearby Ottoman divisions. The Armenian government faced, at best, a long painful process of transforming its theoretical suzerainty into real control. In a few districts, Muslim collaborators facilitated this endeavor. For example, the Kurd Kadimov, commissioned as a colonel in the Armenian army, led southern Ardahan into allegiance to Erevan. Muslim chieftains elsewhere accepted official posts and were inscribed on the government payrolls. Yet, resentment of Armenian rule ran deep among most Muslim inhabitants of the Kars oblast'.²⁶

Many native Muslim leaders, bewildered for a time by the arrest and deportation of the leaders of the South-West Caucasus Republic and by the sudden introduction of Armenian rule, were soon to renew their defiance of Erevan. Nevertheless, not long after Armenia's annexation of Kars, Prime Minister Khatisian felt secure enough to tour the province. At every stop along his circular route from Alexandropol to Kars, Kaghisman, Sarikamish, and Ardahan, he was welcomed by the Armenian population and by deputations of Kurds, Turko-Tatars, Greeks, and Russians, who swore allegiance to the Armenian government and pledged to strive for interracial and interfaith harmony. Alexandre Khatisian was impressed and encouraged, but the true feelings of

²⁵ Rep. of Arm. Del. Archives, Files 8/8 and 22/22; Khatisian, *Hanrapetutian zar-gatsume*, p. 134.

²⁶ Rep. of Arm. Del. Archives, Files 7/7 and 8a/8a, Intelligence reports. See also Alfred Rawlinson, *Adventures in the Near East, 1918-1922* (London and New York: A. Melrose, 1923), pp. 197-219.

most non-Armenians might well have been disguised in these manifestations of good will. The fact that an armed escort, two generals, and several Allied officials accompanied the Armenian chief of state may well have conditioned the warm reception accorded him.²⁷

By the end of its first year, the Republic of Armenia had established nominal jurisdiction over the Kars oblast'. Largely as the result of the British about-face regarding local Muslim rule, it seemed that the borders of the still-evolving state would encompass most of the geographic region known as Russian or Eastern Armenia. Technically, the Armenian republic had now reached the Russo-Turkish frontier of 1914. Western Armenian refugees were already pressing into Surmalu and Kars, coming one step closer to the fulfillment of their obsessing fixation—to plough once again the soil of Van, Bitlis, Erzerum, Diarbekir, Sivas, Kharpert, and lands beyond. Whether the barriers between Eastern Armenia and Western Armenia would be lifted was dependent on the decisions of the Paris Peace Conference and the actions of the Allied Powers.

Progress and Challenges

The annexed districts, with their fertile farmlands, dense stands of timber, and salt mines, improved the country's economic potential. The government allocated 36 million rubles to assist with the repatriation of the refugee population, 8 million for improvements in the city of Kars, and smaller sums for Kaghisman and Ardahan. By the summer of 1919, the municipal administrations in the province were operating bakeries, repairing streets and sewers, and providing loans to rehabilitate businesses.²⁸ With the thawing of the heavy snowdrifts, engineer Gevorg Khatisian directed the upgrading of the overland road between Kars and Batum, and mechanics put a number of trucks into running order. The Armenian Railway Administration expanded service from Alexandropol to Sarikamish and from there by narrow-gauge railway to the border at Karaorgan, and then during the summer scheduled daily passenger service between Alexandropol and Kars. In addition, the State Properties Administration was able to resume operations of

²⁷ Khatisian, *Hanrapetutian zargatsume*, pp. 135-37.

²⁸ *Haraj* (Erevan), Jan 11:4, 1920; Simon Vratzian, *Hayastani Hanrapetutian* [Republic of Armenia] (Paris: H.H.D. Amerikayi K.K., 1928), p. 324.

the Kulp and Kaghisman salt mines, among the richest and largest deposits in the Caucasus.²⁹

Thousands of Western Armenian refugees poured into the Kars oblast' in anticipation of being allowed to return to their homes across the border. Prime Minister Khatisian was hopeful that the first step would be to arrange for the return of 40,000 natives of the Alashkert valley, but such hopes were dashed by the unwillingness of the Allied Powers to commit the resources for such an operation. The Armenian army lacked the strength to do so itself, as it was spread thinly around the perimeters of the country and even had to take up positions around Muslim-populated districts near Erevan which refused to recognize the Armenian government. Within the Kars oblast', the Armenian garrison at Kaghisman on the Arax River was made up of only 400 men. In the surrounding hill country, Kurdish chieftains Hasan Bey and Omar Agha continued to dominate a semi-feudal tribal society as did Ayyub Pasha around Barduz and Jafar Bey in Olti. All were encouraged and assisted by Turkish officers who had stayed behind as instructors and artillerymen when the regular army had withdrawn. The Armenian administration did gain the support of some Muslim notables in return for local autonomy, as was the case of Iso Bek in eastern Olti and Colonel Kadimov in southern Ardahan.

The impending British withdrawal from the Caucasus gave heart to many Muslims who were becoming resigned to Armenian dominion. General Kiazim Karabekir, commander of the Turkish XV Army Corps and the eastern front, sent agents to Barduz, Olti, and Sharur-Nakhichevan to exhort the Muslims to resist. He cleverly circumvented and defied British control officers who had been assigned the responsibility of shipping out arms and ammunition in excess of limits allowed by the Mudros Armistice. He arranged for "rock slides" to block the rails and for "unknown bands" to raid the military depots for subsequent use. During the summer of 1919, British officers reported that the Turks were not cooperating even ostensibly any longer and that many emissaries were crossing over the mountains of Barduz and Olti to agitate the population.³⁰

²⁹ Rep. of Arm. Del. Archives, Files 5/5, 13/13, and 22/22; *Ashkhatavor* (Tiflis), Nov. 2:4, 11:4, 1919.

³⁰ See Kazim Karabekir, *İstiklal Harbimiz* [Our War of Independence] (Istanbul: Türkiye Yayınevi, 1960), pp. 23-25, 42-43, 46, 66-100, 307-18, 350-60 *passim*; Rawlinson, *Adventures in the Near East*, pp. 184, 190.

During the summer of 1919, as the British withdrew from the Caucasus, Muslim detachments isolated outlying Armenian posts and engaged the Armenian regiments in frequent skirmishes around Bashkoy and Karakurt. Near Novo-Selim and Begli-Ahmed, the tribesmen, reinforced by Turkish platoons, tried to cut the railway and the main road between Kars and Sarikamish. Once again, Armenian peasants who had just returned to their homes between Sarikamish and the frontier began to abandon their homes and harvest. Turkish regulars, British intelligence reported, were operating at the rear of the Kurds; Ayyub Pasha had even allowed Turkish officers to take command of his sector. These developments prompted the British mission at Kars to advise Governor Korganian, field commander General Hovsepian, and fortress commandant General Daniel Bek Pirumian to pull back the civilian population from Bashkoy, Karakurt, Sarikamish, Kaghisman, Merdenek, and other threatened locations and to concentrate their scattered military forces around Kars to defend the great fortress. The Armenians protested that this would demoralize the troops and that the threat to Kars did not come from a lack of manpower but rather the lack of rifles and ammunition, which the Allies still failed to supply. General Pirumian deplored the tactic of awarding Kars to Armenia and then immediately deserting the country. Even the moral support provided by the small British missions at Erevan and Kars was soon to come to an end.³¹

In his final report, Captain Prosser, the British military representative at Kars, described the Armenians as so distressed that they tried to prevent his departure on the night of August 30. All available Armenian troops had been dispatched to Sarikamish and Kaghisman, and many wounded were being carried back from these fronts. Civilians had been forbidden to leave Kars but some were nonetheless fleeing by night. He wrote with foresight: "The Armenians are undoubtedly depressed at the withdrawal of the British to whom in spite of frequent assurances to the contrary they had looked to the last for assistance on behalf of the Allies. They talk about fighting to the death, etc., but I think that most of the fight in them went with our departure. . . . They

³¹ On the widespread Muslim insurgency against the Armenian government during the summer of 1919, see Richard G. Hovannisian, *The Republic of Armenia*, vol. 2 (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1982), esp. pp. 62-108.

are surrounded by a hostile population and with the advent of the Turk, Kars as a portion of Armenia will most likely cease to exist.”³²

The British representative in Erevan, Lieutenant Colonel J.C. Plowden, on his departure from the Armenian capital at about the same time, wrote that the major source of Armenia’s problems was “the hope that some at least of all the astounding promises that had been made her by the Allies, before, during and since the war will be fulfilled.” Only Armenia had remained loyal to the Allied cause, suffered terribly, whereas Azerbaijan had embraced the Turks, and Georgia had taken a pro-German and anti-Allied stance. These facts made it all the more difficult for the Armenians to comprehend why they had not been given favorable treatment by the Allies. The Turks were supplying insurgents with officers and arms, yet the British still failed to provide the Armenians with rifles and ammunition for self-defense. “Although practically completely without boots, no suitable clothing, no ammunition and no bayonets, they have fought against very considerably superior numbers, better fed, better clothed and with unlimited S.A.A. [small arms ammunition] against troops entrenched behind wall and trenches, with a bravery equal to the best European troops.” Time was running short, for a Turkish offensive would be accompanied by renewed massacres and even without this thousands of refugees would die.³³

The Muslim forces in Kars grew bolder in mid-August when Omar Agha attacked the Armenian garrison at Kaghisman and was driven back into the hills only after three days of battle and the arrival of reinforcements from Kars.³⁴ The Armenian government declared a state of emergency and again appealed to the Allied Powers and the legislatures of the world for assistance. Finally, between August 28 and 30, Colonel Mirimanian’s 4th and Colonel Shahbudaghian’s 5th infantry regiments were able to stem the insurgents’ attempt to encircle Sarikamish. The Armenians gained the initiative on August 31 when they recaptured Karakurt and advanced to the hills about Bashkoy. In the northern sector, the Devik detachment took the Verishan heights and occupied several villages including Verishan, Bashkoy, and Bekkoy. On September 2, the 4th Regiment engaged Ayyub Pasha’s forces near Kizilkilisa and seized Mount Gumridagh, driving the insurgents toward

³² FO 371/4159, 145863/521/44, App. C.

³³ *Ibid.*, App. D.

³⁴ Rep. of Arm. Del. Archives, File 8a/8a; FO 371/3659, 123719/512/58.

Barduz. Most of the border posts were back under Armenian control by early September, when the Armenian villagers gradually returned to their fields.³⁵

These local successes were treated as momentous victories. The Armenian Parliament praised the officers and men who had fought so courageously against superior forces. In Kars, thanksgiving services were held in the Church of the Holy Apostles, and a victory parade was organized to reassure the frightened inhabitants. At the same time, the 7th Infantry Regiment was organized under the command of the popular Western Armenian partisan leader Sebouh and became the first army formation to use the national language at all levels.³⁶ Military operations continued into September, when the Armenians captured the border posts through which Ayyub Pasha was receiving arms and matériel over Hasankale. Ayyub himself was reportedly wounded near Barduz and withdrew toward Olti with many Muslim fugitives. The influence of Turkish officers in the Olti sector seemed to have weakened by October, when the local Kurdish notables began to consider an accommodation with the Armenian authorities.³⁷ The summer of insurgency had been costly for the Armenians, who suffered hundreds of casualties and the loss or damage of critical food crops. The British armed forces had been of no assistance and by mid-September had withdrawn from all of Transcaucasia except for the strategic port of Batum. In fact, it was thanks to a secret shipment of arms and ammunition from A.I. Denikin's Russian Volunteer Army that had made it possible for the Armenians to recover their positions in Kars.³⁸

Just as the hostilities ended and both General Karabekir and Mustafa Kemal loudly denounced Armenian brutality against the peaceful Muslim population, an American fact-finding mission arrived in Anatolia en route to Armenia. The American Military Mission to Armenia, headed by Major General James G. Harbord, was assigned to collect information of every kind that would be helpful in determining whether the United States should assume a protectorate or mandate for Armenia and, in case the mandate were to be accepted, to have valu-

³⁵ Rep. of Arm. Del. Archives, Files 8a/8a and 66a/3; *Nor ashkhatavor* (Tiflis), Sept. 3:2, 4:2, 12:4, 1919.

³⁶ *Nor ashkhatavor*, Sept. 9:2, 12:4, 1919.

³⁷ Rep. of Arm. Del. Archives, File 8a/8a.

³⁸ FO 371/3659-3660, 134002/157883/512/58; Rep. of Arm. Del. Archives, File 8a/8a, *Svodka*.

able data available to assist in that undertaking.³⁹ Harbord heard the bitter complaints against the Armenians by Kemal in Sivas and Karabekir in Erzerum before the mission crossed the prewar boundary at Khorasan on September 25, 1919. The Americans were met the next day in Sarikamish by Armenia's Minister of Military Affairs, General Kristapor Araratian, commandant of the local garrison Colonel Mirimanian, and other officers. They were then welcomed to Kars on September 27 with a twenty-one gun salute. Harbord conferred with General Hovsepian, Governor General Korganian, and Mayor Hamazasp Norhatian before visiting students and orphans and conducting an inspection of the Armenian troops assembled in the central square. He was highly gratified by the work of the American humanitarian organizations there but was suspicious of the Armenians, whose three-hour banquet filled with song, dance, and toasts made him think that these festivities were intended to hinder a more thorough investigation of the charges made by Kemal and Karabekir. The mission proceeded over Kaghisman to the province of Erevan at the end of September. Harbord paid his respects to Catholicos Gevorg V in Echmiadzin, which was teeming with Western Armenian refugees and orphans, and then rode the short distance to Erevan for consultations with and advice to the cabinet of Alexandre Khatisian.⁴⁰

By the time the Harbord mission returned to the United States in November, it had compiled numerous reports ranging from agriculture and mineral resources to transport and communications and political analyses. The report on the proposed boundaries of Armenia, authored by Major (Professor) Lawrence Martin, recommended that, based on economic, topographic, and ethnographic factors, the future borders of the Armenian state should include all of the province of Kars and extend along the Taurus and Anti-Taurus mountain ranges, meaning the incorporation of much of the Ottoman provinces (*vilayets*) of Van, Bitlis, and Erzerum, and have its own seaports. While the materials compiled and composed by the Harbord mission remain an impressive testimony to the thoroughness of the American specialists, the United States ultimately declined the mandate for Armenia, dealing a severe blow to Armenian aspirations to combine the former Russian Armenian

³⁹ For the extensive records and detailed reports of the American Military Mission to Armenia (Harbord Mission), see US Archives, RG 256, Files 184.021 and 184/02102.

⁴⁰ Hovannisian, *Republic of Armenia*, vol. 2, pp. 334-50.

and Turkish Armenian provinces into a free and independent nation state.⁴¹

President Woodrow Wilson, rebuffed by his own Senate which refused to ratify the Treaty of Versailles with Germany and authorize U.S. membership in the League of Nations, informed the European Allies at the end of 1919 that the United States could not participate in drafting and signing the peace treaty with the Ottoman Empire, however much the Americans were concerned about the wellbeing of the ravaged Armenian people.⁴² This development allowed the European powers to justify a great reduction in the extent of the future Armenian state. In fact, it became questionable whether Armenia could even take possession of and defend Erzerum. At least 20,000 European troops would be necessary to assist Armenia during the formative period, but neither Great Britain nor France was willing to undertake that responsibility, which they insisted the United States should shoulder. Still, there was no question that the whole of the province of Kars would be included in whatever boundary would be defined in the peace treaty.

In the absence of a mandate and military support, the Western powers did extend *de facto* recognition to the Republic of Armenia in January 1920. The news was celebrated with great festiveness throughout the country. At Kars, a military parade and various cultural events welcomed Armenia's entry into the world family of nations. Some organic progress was also being made. Workshops for refugees were expanded in Kars, Sarikamish, and elsewhere; a branch of the Red Cross was established; additional orphanages and hospitals were opened; several mobile medical units began to function; sixteen pair of oxen and farm equipment were purchased to assist the peasant population; and allocations were made for the repair and extension of irrigation canals. For the advancement of public education, timber from the Sarikamish sawmills was used to manufacture desks and other school furniture, and pedagogical courses were opened in Kars.⁴³

Kars figured heavily in Armenia's plans to escape from its landlocked isolation. Hopefully, the Paris Peace Conference would make provision for Armenia to have a corridor to the port of Batum, despite Georgian claims to the entire region. This would entail the upgrading

⁴¹ US Archives, RG 256, 184.021.02/13.

⁴² See US Archives, File 763.721119, Nov.-Dec. 1919 *passim*.

⁴³ Hovannisian, *Republic of Armenia*, vol. 2, pp. 511-17, and vol. 3 (1996), pp. 11-17.

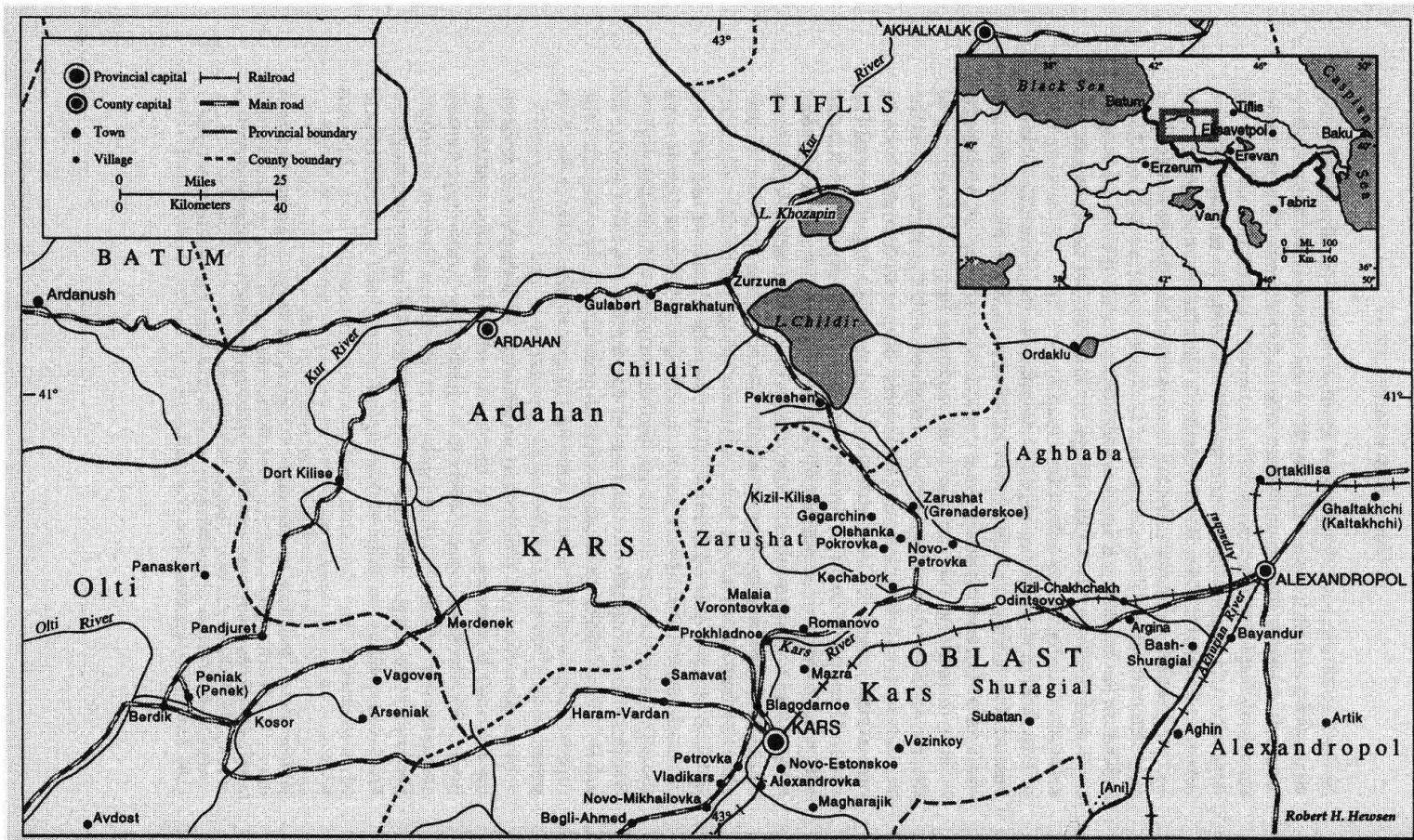
of the Kars-Ardahan-Artvin-Batum secondary road as well as the construction of an Armenian railway line from Kars through the Chorokh River Valley to the sea, thereby reducing significantly the distance to the sea and obviating reliance on the existing single roundabout railway that passed through Georgian territory and the political implications that this entailed. During Allied deliberations regarding the Turkish treaty during the first part of 1920, the specially-appointed "Armenia Committee" recommended that the Batum district (where a British garrison remained until the summer of 1920) be made into a free state and that Armenia be granted unhindered access to its port by being accorded full control of the Kars-Ardahan-Artvin road as well as a corridor for railway construction through the Chorokh Valley. These recommendations took for granted that Kars would lie well within the ultimate borders of the Republic of Armenia.⁴⁴

Despite these recommendations and sustained British pressure on the Georgian representatives to accept Armenia's possession of the left bank of the Chorokh River for a railroad to Batum, the Georgians balked, rejecting any territorial concessions and offering instead free access and facilities for all countries in the region. After intense negotiations, the Armenian representatives, Avetis Aharonian and Boghos Nubar Pasha, compromised by giving up claims to a territorial corridor so long as Armenia could have full control "en toute propriété" over the projected railroad. The Georgian spokesmen stubbornly resisted the British admonitions and ultimately succeeded in having their way, leaving the issue in abeyance and keeping Armenia economically dependent on the Georgian railway system.⁴⁵ By the time that the British sailed away from Batum, the scheme for a free state had been abandoned and in July 1920 the port and hinterland were turned over to the Republic of Georgia, partly as a way to encourage the Georgians to resist encroachments both by the Soviet Red Army, which had already marched into Azerbaijan at the end of April, and by Mustafa Kemal's outlawed Turkish Nationalist forces.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Great Britain, Foreign Office, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939*, 1st ser., vol. 7 (London: HMSO, 1958), pp. 280-85.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 514, 520-21, 639-60, 728-30; FO 371/4931-4936, E616/E852/E1066/E1174/E1850/E1858/E1906/E2056/E2721/E3963/E4190/1/58; Rep. of Arm. Del. Archives, File 118/17.

⁴⁶ FO 371/4940, E6314/1/58, and FO 371/4957, E7206/134/58; Hovannisian, *Republic of Armenia*, vol. 3 (1996), pp. 353-68.



The Kars Operation, Summer 1920

Renewed Unrest and the May Uprising in 1920

Celebration of Allied recognition of the Republic of Armenia did not mask the difficulties that the army continued to experience in Kars and within its own ranks during the first months of 1920. The year began with unrest in the province's northern districts of Aghbaba, Childer, and Zarishat (Zarushat). There were more than a hundred small Muslim villages in that area as well as twenty Russian sectarian villages. Supported by Turkish and Azerbaijani agents and money, the Muslim leaders headed by Kurd Selim and Mahmed Aghababekov resolved in a secret meeting in the village of Gegarchin on January 12 to reject even nominal Armenian rule. The insurgents expelled the Armenian officials and tax collectors from the three districts on January 24 and seized the strategic Zurzuna pass in Childer. In response, three days later Colonel Mazmanian's 1st Armenian Infantry Regiment moved from Merdenek to reopen the pass and secure the road to Ardahan but had to hold up in the village of Gulapert because of the heavy snowdrifts. Meanwhile, the Armenian-appointed Muslim governor of Ardahan dispatched envoys to urge the rebels to lay down their arms and spare the district from ruin.⁴⁷

The most serious threat came from Zarishat, because of its proximity to the road and railway between Kars and Alexandropol. General Hovsepian brought up troops and artillery to the Russian Molokan village of Romanovo on January 28 and through Molokan messengers demanded that the district acknowledge Armenian suzerainty. The Republic, he wrote, had just received international recognition and wished to end the disturbance without bloodshed but was prepared to take military action if it became necessary. The Muslim leaders tried to gain time by replying that they wished to consult with representatives of the district's forty-six villages. Hovsepian's response on February 2 was bombardment of the villages of Pokrovka and Kechabork and then of Gegarchin, Olshanka, and Kizilkilisa, the last being Kurd Selim's native village. As the Muslim partisans scattered into the hill country, Zarishat submitted on February 10. Twenty-five notables from Zarishat and Ardahan arrived in Kars five days later to profess their loyalty. In telegrams to Prime Minister Khatisian, they asked to be "liberated" from outside agitators and to be accepted as equal citizens of the Re-

⁴⁷ Rep. of Arm. Del. Archives, Files 10/10 and 17/17; FO 371/4954, E2731/E2740/134/58; Vratzian, *Hayastani Hanrapetutiun*, p. 338.

public of Armenia. During a banquet tendered by Governor General Korganian, the Muslim leaders repeated their curses of the alleged provocateurs and reiterated their pledges of fidelity. Similar declarations were made by the chairman of the Kars Muslim National Council and the head of the ulema. There could be little doubt, however, that these attestations were made under considerable duress.⁴⁸

The capitulation of Zarishat discouraged the other defiant districts. Colonel Mazmanian finally broke through the Zurzuna pass on March 8 and forced Childer to submit six days later. Kerbala Mahmed Agha-babekov continued sporadic resistance in Aghbaba until the end of the month but ultimately found himself isolated and incapable of carrying on alone. As an indemnity, the insurgents were required to hand over certain quotas of weapons and ammunition to be carted away to Kars. Hovsepian informed the army's general staff in Erevan that happily Zarishat was again linked by trade with Kars and paying taxes and had been allowed to retain just enough guns and ammunition to protect its livestock.⁴⁹

The turmoil in 1920 caused great distress among the Muslim inhabitants. According to Azerbaijani sources, as many as 10,000 people were made homeless. Both Azerbaijani and Turkish representatives protested against what they described as a merciless campaign to eliminate the population of a district rightfully a part of Azerbaijan or Turkey. Generals Nazarbekian and Hovsepian, on the other hand, pointed the finger of blame at external provocateurs who had persuaded the local Muslim leaders that the Armenian government was weak and incapable of suppressing a general uprising. Such agitation had led to much woe for the Muslim inhabitants, who hopefully now would turn away from the bloody troublemakers.⁵⁰

All was not well within the Armenian army itself. The continuous deprivations and military action without adequate arms and winter clothing created deep dissatisfaction, as did the behavior of the Armenian officer corps, which for the most part had been schooled in Russian military academies and trained for imperial warfare, not small-

⁴⁸ Rep. of Arm. Del. Archives, Files 9/9, 10/10, 17/17, and 66a/3; FO 371/4954, E1915/E1916/E2739/E2740/134/58; FO 371/5166, E2610/262/44; *Haraj*, Feb. 6:2, 18:1-2, March 2:2, 1920; Vratzian, *Hayastani Hanrapetutiun*, pp. 339-40.

⁴⁹ FO 371/4954-4956, E3348/E4099/134/58; Rep. of Arm. Del. Archives, File 66a/3, № 74, April 6, 1920; *Haraj*, March 17:1, 1920.

⁵⁰ Rep. of Arm. Del. Archives, File 17/17; Vratzian, *Hayastani Hanrapetutiun*, p. 338.

scale battles and localized insurgency. There was little rapport between the Russian-speaking officers and the enlisted men, and this was even more so the case with the Western Armenians. These difficulties were exploited by the small number of active Bolshevik adherents in Armenia, who spread pro-Russian and pro-Soviet propaganda among the ranks. The bloodless Sovietization of Azerbaijan on April 28, 1920 (with encouragement from the Turkish Nationalists) gave hope to the Armenian Bolsheviks that the Red Army would soon march on Erevan and overthrow the despised "Dashnak lackeys" of the imperialist powers. As it happened, even the predominantly Dashnakist government of Armenia was not saddened to see the fall of the Azerbaijani government with which it had been in conflict for control of the districts of Karabagh, Zangezur, and Nakhichevan since the formation of the Transcaucasian republics in mid-1918. Thus, shortly after news of the coup in Baku, the Armenian government appointed a delegation to travel to Moscow to seek an accord with Lenin's Sovnarkom. But both Soviet Russia and Nationalist Turkey wanted to create a corridor over Transcaucasia to join forces against their mutual enemies. It should have come as no surprise, therefore, that the Red Army set out immediately after Azerbaijan's Sovietization to advance over Karabagh to Nakhichevan. There in the summer of 1920 it exchanged fraternal greetings with a newly-arrived contingent of General Karabekir's "Turkish Red Army."⁵¹

The Sovietization of Azerbaijan had a ripple effect in Transcaucasia as the appearance of the Red Army, combined with the fatigue and hardships of the Armenian population and army, was used by the Armenian Bolsheviks as an opportunity to restore Russian rule, now under the Soviet banner. Although poorly organized and indecisive, they did take advantage of the annual May Day celebrations in 1920 to stage counter-demonstrations against the official rallies sponsored by the party Dashnaktsutun. Bolshevik slogans were heard in a number of towns, especially in the military-industrial center of Alexandropol, where on May 10 a revolutionary committee (Revkom) proclaimed the establishment of Soviet rule in Armenia. The commander of the armored train, Captain Sargis Musayelian, was an active collaborator in this action, and several military units vacillated in their allegiance to

⁵¹ See Hovannisian, *Republic of Armenia*, vol. 3, pp. 173-215 *passim*. On the formation of the Armenian Communist Party, see, for example, Kh.H. Barseghyan, *Hayastani Komunistakan partiyai kazmavorume* (Erevan: Hayastan, 1965).

the Erevan government before they calmed down. On May 11, an expeditionary force commanded by Sebouh, the veteran Western Armenian partisan, set out from Echmiadzin to squelch the rising and three days later put the Revkom to flight.⁵²

Brief-lived revolutionary committees were also formed in Kars and Sarikamish, where they found sympathy among the Russian, Greek, and Muslim villagers, who preferred the restoration of Russian rule to the imposition of Armenian domination. Headquartered in the city's auto-garage, the Kars Revkom under the youthful Ghukas Ghukasian was able to organize a detachment of workers and soldiers on May 10 to occupy the city hall, railway station, post-telegraph office, and treasury building, arrest Mayor Norhatian, and place Governor General Korganian under house arrest. But the next day the Western Armenian partisans headed by Pilos and Matsak were joined by the 7th Infantry Regiment in demanding an end of the "adventure." Although met by machinegun fire from the Revkom's headquarters in the auto-garage, the loyal troops were able to occupy the railway station by nightfall and force Ghukasian and his comrades to escape to one of the high forts. On May 12, the Revkom was pressed from fort to fort, while the 5th Infantry Regiment now pledged allegiance to the government. With serious dissension developing within the Revkom, Ghukasian made a break for Alexandropol, thinking that the Revkom there was still existing. On May 14 the partisans of Matsak, Zelim, and Murad caught up with Ghukasian in the Argina vale, where the young Bolshevik was killed along with eight comrades, the remainder being taken prisoner or fleeing to the hills. The attempted insurrection in Kars had lasted for four days, but had soon been suppressed as the Bolsheviks were unable to capitalize on some initial sympathy in the military ranks and had failed to provide decisive leadership.⁵³

⁵² For Soviet sources on the May uprising, see, for example, [Central Committee of Communist Party of Armenia], *Mayisyan apstambutyune Hayastanum* [The May Rebellion in Armenia] (Erevan, 1930); A.H. Melkonyan, *Mayisyan apstambutyun patmutyan hartsi shurje* [Around the Question of the History of the May Uprising] (Erevan: Hayastan, 1965). See also Hovannisian, *Republic of Armenia*, vol. 3, pp. 209-35; *Haraj*, May 14:1, 15:1, 18:2, 1920; Karo Sasuni [Garo Sassouni], *Mayisian khrovutiunnere ev tatarakan apstamb shrjannere* [The May Disturbances and the Rebellious Tatar Districts] (Beirut: G. Sassouni, 1968).

⁵³ *Mayisyan apstambutyune Hayastanum*, pp. 61-72; Sasuni, *Mayisian khrovutiunnere*, pp. 46-51, 92-99; *Haraj*, May 19:2, 28:5, June 2:1, 1920.

A similar pattern unfolded at Sarikamish. Elements susceptible to Bolshevik propaganda included some 2,000 railway laborers, sawmill operators, and soldiers. The Bolsheviks, led by Adok (Andranik Jughurian) and supported by a left-wing Socialist Revolutionary, Captain Liparit Mkhchian, had been able to make some headway in the 4th Infantry Regiment and to organize a counter-demonstration on May Day. In Sarikamish, too, a Revkom was formed on May 10 and with two companies of infantry and a machinegun squad surrounded the railway depot, telegraph office, city hall, and Dashnakist club, demanding all to surrender. The partisan leader Mikho was killed while trying to fight off the insurgents. Sustained support for the Revkom was lacking, however, and the 4th Regiment, most of which had initially remained passive, soon turned against the rebels. Colonel Mirimanian tried to end the disturbance by persuading the Revkom to send a representative to Kars to confirm the news that the uprising there had failed and that the Kars Revkom had dispersed. By the time that confirmation was received on May 18, Sebouh's armed forces were approaching Sarikamish. The dispirited Revkom fled toward the Turkish frontier but most of its members were caught by the Armenian partisans. Sebouh received a hero's welcome as he entered the city on May 21. Adok paid with his life for his role, and Captain Mkhchian was transferred along with a few others to Kars for trial by an extraordinary court martial.⁵⁴ Disturbances in other parts of Armenia were also suppressed by that time, as the new Armenian government, composed of the entire Bureau or executive body of the party Dashnaktsutun, assumed power and cracked down both on Armenian subversives and Muslim insurgents.

The May uprising in Armenia demoralized the Armenian armed forces. It became clear that even after two years some units had still not become fully committed to the concept of national independence. Such was the reality of the times that men chanting Bolshevik slogans one day could be seen fervently singing the Armenian national anthem, "Mer Hairenik" (Our Fatherland), the next. However short-lived and unsuccessful, the unrest compromised the government's prestige at home and abroad.

⁵⁴ On the unrest in Sarikamish, see *Mayisyan apstambutyune Hayastanum*, pp. 73-79; Melkonyan, *Mayisyan apstambutyun*, pp. 155-56; Elchibekian, *Velikaia Oktiabr'skaia sotsialisticheskaia revoliutsiia*, pp. 137-38; Sasuni, *Mayisian khrovutunere*, pp. 110-16.

Small Steps

Despite the embarrassment caused by the weaknesses exposed in the armed forces, the new Bureau Government attempted to put the best possible face on this episode. Particular emphasis was given to the celebration of the second anniversary of the Republic on May 28, 1920, when all legal Armenian parties and cultural organizations, including avowed opponents of the Dashnaktsutiun, joined together in unprecedented manifestations of solidarity and commitment to the goal of "free, independent, and united Armenia."

Among the small steps forward in Kars in 1920 was the establishment of a regional appellate court, which opened under the presidency of Hambardzum Melkumian on August 18. Putting aside the traditional use of Russian, the court conducted the proceedings in Armenian, albeit with the awkwardness of having to find and apply the legal terminology necessary to conduct the proceedings in the national language. The city administration, too, gradually converted to conducting business and keeping records in Armenian. The principle of municipal initiative and self-government was advanced through the introduction of the *zemstvo* system, entrusting to that local body responsibilities for education, reading rooms, cultural activities, and supervision of the militia. Many new schools opened at the start of the academic year in September 1920, and pedagogical courses in Armenian-language instruction were conducted under the direction of superintendent Aram Oltesian. In the realm of agricultural production, sufficient seed grain was distributed in the province for the first full sowing since the beginning of the Great War in 1914. Although most of Armenia's orphans were placed in the care of American humanitarian organizations at Alexandropol, as many as 6,000 were housed and given vocational training at Kars. Moreover, thousands of Western Armenian refugees who had fled to the North Caucasus and southern Russia now pressed into Kars in anticipation of being able to return to their homes as soon as the borders were opened.⁵⁵

A committee for the preservation of antiquities under the direction of Bishop Garegin Hovsepien, Ashkharhbeq Kalantarian, and Alexandre Tamanian prepared a map of Armenia's historical monuments and in July 1920 sponsored a major archeological expedition. Headed by

⁵⁵ *Haraj*, April 27:4, 28:1, May 6:4, 22:3, 23:2, 25:3, 30:1, June 1:3, 3:3, 4:3, 6:4, July 3:3, 14:4, Aug. 13:2, 31:1, 1920.

Toros Toromanian, the expedition, which included archeologists, architects, photographers, and painters, used the historic site of Tekor as a base for study of the monument-rich Ani-Arju-Tekor-Khtskonk-Bagaran-Mren zone. In August, Tamanian chaired a scholarly conference at Ani, the main focus of which was the preservation and protection of Armenia's antiquities and the creation of a national museum.⁵⁶

After the abortive May uprising, the new Minister of Military Affairs Ruben Ter-Minasian turned his fury against the defiant Muslim-populated districts in the southern part of the Erevan province and ordered the Armenian army to advance into the northwestern sector of the Kars oblast' to occupy the Peniak coalfields near Olti. On June 18, a military expedition made up of the 1st, 4th, and 5th regiments moved out toward the Panjuret and Akundir passes, where they faced two Turkish companies and Izzet Bey's armed detachments. By June 22, Mazmanian's 1st Regiment had taken possession of the Panjuret pass, Shahbudaghian's 5th Regiment had secured the Akundir pass, and all three regimental columns converged on Peniak, halting at the Olti River. The local Muslim population fled through the Tuzla pass, where the defenders and their Turkish auxiliaries regrouped. At the beginning of July, the Armenian forward positions stabilized along the eastern slopes of the mountain range from Hamid Dagħ to Chambar Dagħ and Kerogli.

The occupation of Peniak was cause for great celebration, as Armenia could now alleviate its energy crisis by exploiting the coal fields and, from a political point of view, the Republic of Armenia had expanded to within virtual sight of the 1914 border, beyond which lay Erzerum and other coveted provinces of historic Western Armenia. The government made allocations for the administration of Olti and appointed Levon Khatisian and Professor Savich Zablotsky to head a team to hasten the exploitation of the Peniak deposits. Additional allocations were made to extend the telegraph lines from Merdenek to Olti and from Ardahan to Zurzuna and to upgrade the road to Kaghisman. A consortium of Armenian financiers abroad began negotiations for a contract to construct an electric railway from Kars over the Olti, Peniak, and Chorokh rivers to Batum, thereby shortening the route to the sea by nearly 200 miles and allowing for the profitable exploitation

⁵⁶ Vratzian, *Hayastani Hanrapetutian*, pp. 391-92; *Haraj*, Sept. 19:2, 1920.

of the gold mines of Zarabkhana and the salt mines of Kaghisman and Kulp.⁵⁷

The Armenians were given even more cause for optimism on August 10, 1920, when on behalf of the Republic of Armenia, Avetis Aharonian placed his signature on the Treaty of Sèvres between the Allied Powers and the official Ottoman government. That treaty included the Kars oblast' in the Armenian republic by stipulating that the final boundary between Turkey and Armenia was to fall within the provinces of Trebizond, Erzerum, Bitlis, and Van, with the precise border therein to be arbitrated by the president of the United States of America.

Turkish-Soviet Negotiations and Beginning of the Turkish Offensive

The unexpected Armenian assault on Peniak in the Olti district outraged General Karabekir and led to the first exchange of diplomatic correspondence between Mustafa Kemal's Turkish counter-government at Ankara (Angora), the Grand National Assembly, and the Armenian government. On July 8, Foreign Minister Bekir Sami Bey vehemently protested Armenian excesses and reiterated that the three counties (sanjaks) of Kars, Ardahan, and Batum had been recognized as indivisible parts of Ottoman state by the Brest-Litovsk and Batum treaties in 1918. Thus, the attack on Olti had taken under foot the absolute rights of Turkey and dealt a serious blow to the establishment of normal neighborly relations. In reply, the Armenian foreign ministry wrote on July 28 that it would not dwell on the two treaties mentioned by Bekir Sami because in the first instance they had been signed by the sultan's government which the Ankara regime did not recognize, and, what was more, neither document had been ratified by any party. Armenia desired cordial relations with all its neighbors but not at the expense of its inalienable rights.⁵⁸

During the summer of 1920, the two outcast regimes of Soviet Russia and the Turkish Grand National Assembly sought out each other for

⁵⁷ Rep. of Arm. Del. Archives, Files 8/8, 24/24, and 25/25; *Haraj*, June 19:2, 23:3, 24:2, 25:3, July 1:2, 1920; Vratzian, *Hayastani Hanrapetutun*, pp. 381-83.

⁵⁸ Rep. of Arm. Del. Archives, Files 17/17 and 24/24. For a contemporary English translation of this exchange of correspondence, see FO 371/4959, E/11703/E11868/134/58, enclosures.

mutual support against their powerful enemies in the West. It was the importance of an entente with Soviet Russia that apparently prompted Mustafa Kemal to call off an offensive against Armenia in June. Even before the Armenian operation into Peniak, Karabekir had been pressing Kemal to authorize an operation to seize the Sarikamish pass and surrounding forests and to force the Armenian army to withdraw to Novo-Selim. He argued that such a limited advance would secure a critical strategic advantage and make available a much-needed supply of wood for his locomotives. On June 6, Kemal gave his assent and the next day informed a secret session of the Grand National Assembly that, in view of the recent Armenian atrocities, there was now the opportunity to recover the sanjaks of Kars and Ardahan. Karabekir mobilized his forces on June 8 and set June 23 as the date for the offensive as far as Merdenek and over Sarikamish to Novo-Selim. On June 13, Kemal relayed to Karabekir the text of a note that should be delivered to the Armenian commander just before the attack, which, however, should begin immediately without waiting for a reply. That message deplored the repression and massacres of innocent people subjected to Armenian occupation, a gross injustice that could not be tolerated by the Turkish nation.⁵⁹

Just as the Armenian regiments advanced toward Peniak, Karabekir began to move his own forces up to border, but on June 20 he received a new order from Ankara to postpone the offensive. It was explained that a communication had just been received from Soviet Russia proposing collaboration against their common enemies as well as Soviet mediation to attain an acceptable solution to the Armenian-Turkish question. Aside from feigning deference to the Sovnarkom, Kemal and his general staff were concerned about the Greek military operations in western Anatolia, possible Allied counter-measures to help the Armenians, especially as the British still maintained a garrison at Batum, and the overconfidence of Kiazim Karabekir. Thus, at the last minute, Karabekir was instructed to put off the offensive and was warned not to ignore or circumvent the directive. He was deeply offended by the

⁵⁹ Karabekir, *İstiklal Harbimiz*, pp. 772, 783, 802-05; *Atatürk'ün soylev ve demeçleri* [Ataturk's Speeches and Statements], vol. 1 (Ankara, Maarif Matbaası, 1959), pp. 90-91; *Türk İstiklal Harbi*, vol. 3: *Doğu Cephesi (1919-1921)* [War of Turkish Independence: Eastern Front, 1919-1921] (Ankara; Genelkurmay Basimivi, 1965), pp. 84-95.

tone of the message but complied even as the Armenian regiments approached Peniak.⁶⁰

It was also on June 20 that Mustafa Kemal replied to Soviet Foreign Commissar Grigorii Chicherin that, despite the Armenian atrocities, the Grand National Assembly wished to show its good faith by accepting in principle the Soviet offer of mediation. A delegation would soon set out for deliberations with the Sovnarkom.⁶¹ After a long and difficult journey, the Turkish delegation led by Bekir Sami Bey arrived in Moscow on July 19, 1920, with the objective of gaining Soviet military, financial, and diplomatic support. In his initial meeting with Chicherin and his assistant Lev Karakhan on July 24, Bekir Sami stressed the need to open the overland route between the two countries for unhindered communication and the secure delivery of the Soviet assistance. As Azerbaijan had now become a Soviet republic, this could be achieved by eliminating the barrier posed by the hostile counterrevolutionary Armenian state. But Chicherin and Karakhan criticized the Turkish ultimatum to Armenia to accept the Brest-Litovsk boundaries, especially as the territory in question had been a part of the Russian Empire and Soviet Russia had subsequently repudiated that imperialistic treaty. They were sensitive to Soviet pledges regarding the Armenian right to self-determination and tried to persuade the Turkish envoys to make some concessions. Chicherin suggested that Armenia be allowed to expand to Van and Bitlis but also acknowledged the justice of an adjustment of the former international boundary by which the Olti-Sarikamish sector of the Kars oblast' would be awarded to Turkey. Bekir Sami was deeply alarmed by the proposal and insisted that he was not authorized to discuss such matters. The most he could say was that Turkey might allow the repatriation of Armenian refugees who were bona fide Ottoman subjects and even then they would have to return to their original towns and settlements, where they would enjoy the rights and protection guaranteed to minorities in all civilized countries. Not a single non-Ottoman subject, however, would be permitted to touch foot on Turkish territory. The matter remained unresolved when a draft treaty of friendship was initialed by the two sides on August 24, 1920, just two weeks after the Treaty of Sèvres had been signed. Apparently Lenin and Stalin overruled Chicherin's objections

⁶⁰ Karabekir, *İstiklal Harbimiz*, pp. 807-08; *Atatürk'ün soylev ve demeçleri*, p. 91.

⁶¹ FO 371/5170, E9978/262/44, App. A; Ivar Spector, *The Soviet Union and the Muslim World, 1917-1958* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1959), p. 70.

and committed Soviet Russia to military and financial support without commensurate concessions from the Turkish side. Bekir Sami immediately dispatched a member of his delegation, Yusuf Kemal, to report to Mustafa Kemal on the terms of the draft treaty and to give assurances that, despite Chicherin's unacceptable demands, the Red Army would not intervene in case of a Turkish offensive against Armenia.⁶²

The Armenian-Turkish War

Even before the receipt of Yusuf Kemal's report relayed from Trebizond in mid-September, Mustafa Kemal and Chief of Staff Ismet (Inonu) had come around to favoring an operation to drive the Armenians from Olti and take control of the strategic mountains around Sarikamish. They authorized General Karabekir to begin the operation that had been postponed in June by attacking on the night of September 12/13. Having already moved elements of the 9th Caucasian Division and 12th Infantry Division to the border to establish a bridgehead in the Barduz-Tuzla sector, Karabekir struck the Armenian positions in Olti before dawn on September 13. The small Armenian detachments resisted for a day before withdrawing from Vaskut to the village of Kosor and from Israil to the Panjuret pass and on to Merdenek. In a single day, the Armenians lost all of the territory occupied in June and suffered 200 casualties, dead or wounded. Still, the Armenian command was not overly concerned, ascribing the setback to local conditions and continuing to insist that the Armenian forces held a formidable military advantage.⁶³

On September 20, 1920, after this easy victory and receipt of Yusuf Kemal's report regarding Russian non-interference, Mustafa Kemal instructed Karabekir to resume the offensive as far as Kaghisman, Novo-Selim, and Merdenek and, if conditions were right, even closer to the fortress of Kars itself. The main objective was to destroy the Armenian army, for which secrecy and surprise were of the utmost importance. In addition, emissaries had to reassure the Georgian authorities of no hostile intent in order to secure Georgian neutrality. Karabekir replied that

⁶² Hovannisian, *Republic of Armenia*, vol. 4 (1996), pp. 153-166. See the personal account of Yusuf Kemal [Tengirşek], *Vatan hizmetinde* [In Service of the Fatherland] (Istanbul, Bahar Matbaası, 1967), pp. 149-92.

⁶³ *Doğu Cephesi*, pp. 127-30; Karabekir, *İstiklal Harbimiz*, pp. 863-72, 877, 882-84; Rep. of Arm. Del. Archives, File 24/24; FO 371/4960, E11896/E12108/E12651/E12813/134/58; *Haraj*, Sept. 16:2, 1920.

he would be prepared to move on September 27. The 9th and 12th divisions would advance to the Karakurt-Sarikamish-Mount Allahekbare line, while to the south of Erevan the Turkish battalion that had joined up with a Red Army detachment in Nakhichevan would drive the Armenians out of Shahtaght.⁶⁴

On September 27, Kemal announced in a secret session of the Grand National Assembly that the Turkish army would march the following morning. A few hours later, after midnight, the campaign began. The startled Armenians resisted the 9th Division for several hours before falling back to the Bashkoy-Verishan-Mount Kumru-Mount Husein Aghayurd line, while in the south, the 12th Caucasian Division advanced into Karakurt and Karaorgan, compelling the panic-stricken Armenian villagers to abandon the harvest and flee toward Sarikamish and Kars. To Karabekir's chagrin, Sarikamish was not taken as planned that day, requiring a new order of the day calling for the encirclement of the town. Realizing that the Turks were trying to isolate the Sarikamish garrison by cutting the rails at Novo-Selim, the Armenian command ordered a complete withdrawal on the night of September 28. This action was sharply criticized by members of the government, but the generals justified this decision by insisting that the 2,500 men in the Sarikamish sector and 1,500 men in the Olti-Merdenek sector were insufficient to hold those fronts without sizable reinforcements. The retreat had been orderly and both the military and civilian population had escaped the Turkish vise without any losses.⁶⁵

Within three days, General Karabekir had captured the strategic fortress of Sarikamish and the surrounding Soghanli mountain range and forests and descended into plain of Kars. It was a major military and psychological victory. The Armenian 4th Regiment retreated to Novo-Selim and then to Begli-Ahmed; the 5th Regiment abandoned Kaghisman and took up new positions on the Berna heights; and the Olti-Merdenek detachment drew back to the village of Radinovka. Mustafa Kemal, apparently still anxious about the reactions of the Allied Powers and Soviet Russia, now called a temporary halt to the offensive. He instructed Bekir Sami in Moscow to present the justification for the occupation of Olti and Sarikamish and to play up the

⁶⁴ *Doğu Cephesi*, p. 146; Karabekir, *İstiklal Harbimiz*, p. 887; *Harb Tarihi Vesikaları Dergisi*, [Journal of War History Documents], 13th year, 49 (Sept. 1964), № 1134. See also US Archives, RG 59, 760G.62/orig.

⁶⁵ *Doğu Cephesi*, pp. 160-66; Karabekir, *İstiklal Harbimiz*, p. 888; Rep. of Arm. Del. Archives, Files 17/17 and 24/24.

importance of the operation in breaking down the barrier between Russia and Turkey.

The Armenian military and civil officials were stunned by the Turkish offensive, as they had not believed that Kemal, beset by so many internal problems and military reverses on the western front, would dare such provocative action. On September 30, the Bureau Government declared the country in a state of siege, proclaimed martial law, and issued orders for general mobilization. Its public declarations called on the people to recall the heroism of Sardarabad in 1918 and to take arms again in the "Holy War." Patriotic manifestations were made by all Armenian political parties, which once more appealed to the "civilized world" to intervene against the sinister designs of a renewed pan-Turkism and to honor the countless pledges to the Armenian people by enforcing the Treaty of Sèvres. The government also addressed Soviet Russia, drawing attention to its past declarations and urging it to restrain the Turkish leaders, who claimed to be allied with Russia.⁶⁶

The lull in the fighting at the end of September gave some hope to the Armenians, who were encouraged by the enlistment of new volunteers and ongoing negotiations with the Sovnarkom premised on recognition of the Armenian republic's independence and inviolability. By mid-October, the Armenian military at Kars had been reinforced with the arrival of elements of the 7th Regiment from Dilijan and parts of the 8th Regiment from Igdir. In the sporadic skirmishes that followed, the army was able to hold its own and even make a few favorable adjustments on the front line. Cabinet members Artashes Babalian and Simon Vratzian reported from Kars on October 4 that the local administration and commanders had a highly positive outlook on the situation, but the pair was critical of Hovsepian and Pirumian, who had sounded the call to retreat at the first sight of a Turkish soldier. The ministers deplored the harmful rivalry between civil and military administrations at Kars and urged that Sebouh be transferred there immediately, especially as the Western Armenian fighting men had no confidence in the generals. Member of Parliament and prominent Dashnakist Levon Tadeosian further recommended the appointment of a new military governor (but neither Pirumian nor Hovsepian), yet Minister of Military Affairs Ter-Minasian maintained that the time was not right for sweeping changes and that once the crisis had been surmounted the entire military structure would be revamped. Meanwhile,

⁶⁶ Hovannisian, *Republic of Armenia*, vol. 4, pp. 197-202.

the generals at Kars were to be reminded that any more incompetence would inevitably lead to both military and civilian suffering and deaths for which they would be held personally accountable.⁶⁷ The structural problems of the Armenian army were never resolved, as the top-heavy Russian imperial military system continued to exist on a miniature basis, with the army headquarters of General Nazarbekian in Erevan, the field headquarters of General Movses Silikian in Alexandropol, the front headquarters of the quarrelsome General Hovsepien located in a railway car between Kars and Sarikamish, and the fortress headquarters of General Pirumian in the network of forts that enveloped the great hillside facing the plain of Kars to the west. On the other hand, commander of the Turkish eastern front Kiazim Karabekir was never far behind the front lines.

The Armenian command continued to submit confident reports as the troop strength grew to some 10,000 men along the front stretching from Merdenek in the north to Haram-Vardan in the center and Mount Haji Khalil in the south. In all, the five infantry regiments, squadrons of cavalry, and Western Armenian partisans made up fourteen battalions, inspiring General Silikian's headquarters in Alexandropol to make plans for a counter-offensive to recapture the lost terrain. The operation began before dawn on October 14, but did not go well, as the 1st and 7th regiments moved out from Haram-Vardan long after the appointed hour, losing the advantage of surprise and encountering strong resistance. They nonetheless fought their way to Mount Kizilgedik and Mount Beshkaya. General Hovsepien, never leaving his railway-car headquarters near Begli-Ahmed, failed to provide decisive leadership. By nightfall, the 1st and 5th regiments were in disorderly retreat, which did not stop until they had reached Vladikars, within sight of the great fortress. They returned to their original positions only after realizing that they were not being pursued. The failed counter-offensive of October 14 broke what was left of the morale of the army, which suffered 600 casualties, including about 100 dead.⁶⁸ The one-day battle on October 14 completed the first phase of the Armenian-Turkish war, with the Turkish army taking control of the province up to the Merdenek-Novo Selim-Kaghisman line. General Karabekir now

⁶⁷ Artashes Babalian, "Karsi ankume" [The Fall of Kars], *Hairenik Amsagir* 1 (Oct. 1923): 55; Hovannisian, *Republic of Armenia*, vol. 4, pp. 238-39.

⁶⁸ Rep. of Arm. Del. Archives, Files 17/17, 24/24, and 25/25; Babalian, "Karsi ankume," pp. 55-57; *Doğu Cephesi*, pp. 173-75. See also FO 3371/4964, E14902/134/58.

had no doubt that he would gain control of the fortress of Kars and march all the way to the Arpachai River.

Fall of the Fortress

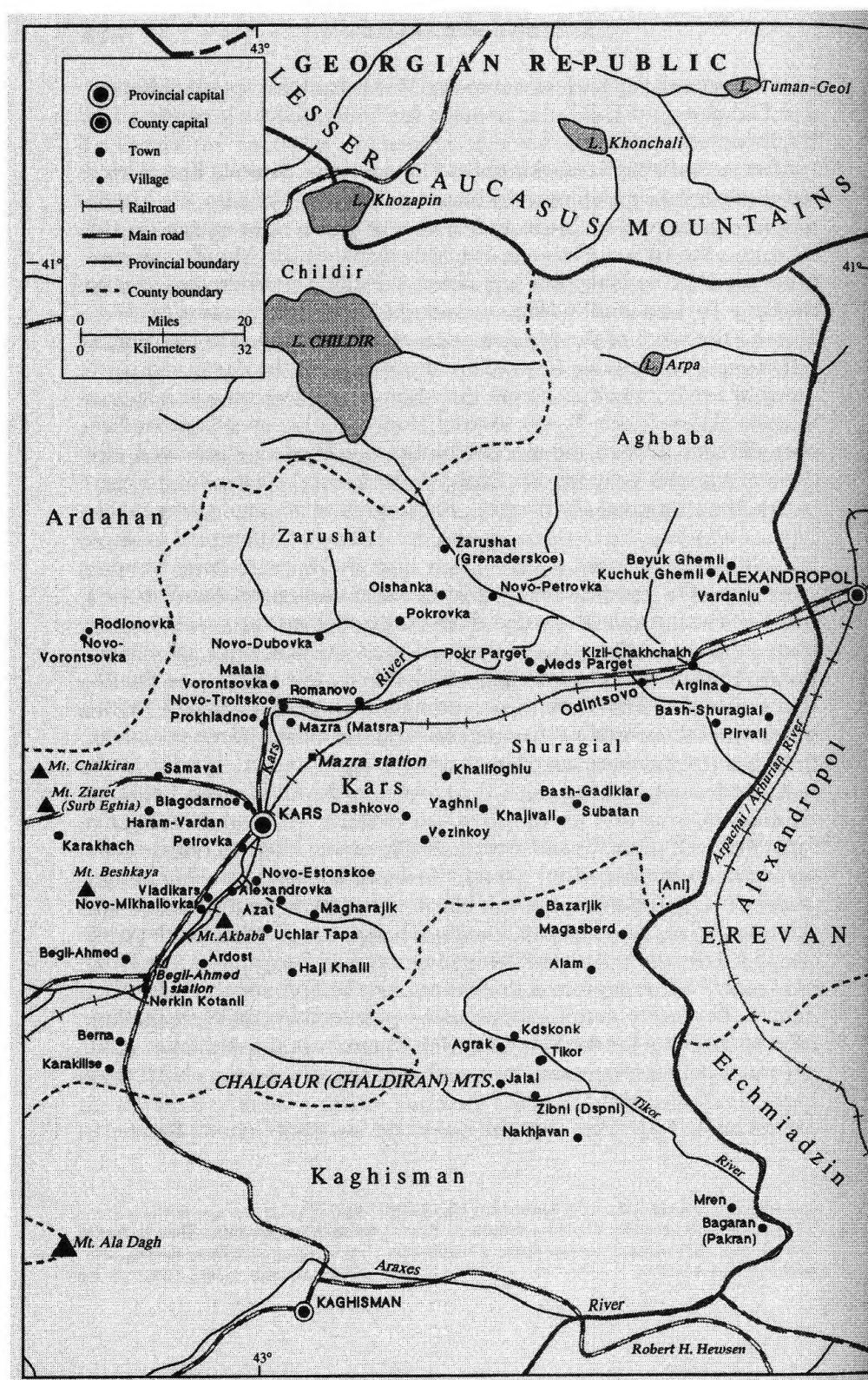
Mustafa Kemal was deeply gratified by the impressive victory on the eastern front. He now was convinced that no one would intervene to assist the Armenians. Capture of the fortress of Kars would produce major military and political benefits for Turkey, destroy the Armenian army, and prevent any possibility of Georgian or Russian interference. Stating that it was vital "to take matters into our own hands," he now exhorted Karabekir to seize the opportunity that had been presented. The formal decision to resume the offensive was wired to Karabekir on October 20. The Ankara government took precautions to issue statements to prepare the public and foreign powers for the forthcoming operation by condemning the brutality of the nefarious Dashnakist regime and its merciless persecution of the Muslim population. Turkey had no aggressive designs against the Armenian people but simply was defending its right as a nation.⁶⁹

General Karabekir issued marching orders to resume the offensive on October 27. The battle plan called for the creation of a diversion on the front facing Kars, while the main force would pass secretly to the rear of the fortress in order to cut the railway and road, thereby isolating Kars and blocking any reinforcements coming from Alexandropol. In pursuit of this strategy, Karabekir created a ruse by leaving tents pitched and campfires burning in their previous locations, while the main body of Turkish troops slipped over the heights around Kars. The Armenian command did not detect the enemy movements and remained confident in the impregnability of the fortress.⁷⁰

The skillful leadership of General Karabekir was temporarily hampered by freezing weather, rain and fog, and the failure of the 9th Division to take control of the railway behind Kars on schedule. But to the west of the fortress the blizzard conditions on October 28 also drove the Armenian defenders from the heights of Haji Khalil, after having held out for days against repeated Turkish assaults. The men of the 8th Regiment took shelter in the outlying forts of Kars, where the 5th

⁶⁹ *Doğu Cephesi*, pp. 178-82, 303; *Harb Tarihi Vesikaları Dergisi*, № 1138.

⁷⁰ Karabekir, *İstiklal Harbimiz*, pp. 895-97; *Doğu Cephesi*, pp. 187-94, 304-05; Babalian, "Karsi ankume," p. 61.



The Kars Front, October 1920

Regiment also retreated from the Aghbaba heights, while the 4th Regiment pulled back from Begli-Ahmed to the village of Prokhladnoe. Now belatedly Nazarbekian appointed General Hovhannes Ghazarian (Ivan Kazarov) to replace Hovsepian as commander of the front. Ironically, Hovsepian's reassignment was to spare him the humiliation of falling prisoner to Karabekir.⁷¹

Despite Pirumian's continued insistence that the great fortress, which in normal times could billet 40,000 troops, was secure, on October 29 the Armenian authorities prohibited the departure of the city's large civilian population in order not to demoralize the armed forces further. The deterioration of the situation was made clear that same night when 1st Regiment commander Mazmanian put a Mauser revolver to his head and ended his life when his men refused to follow him in an attempt to retake the Vezinkoy heights. At the same time, Armenian Bolsheviks spread defeatist propaganda by declaring that the Turkish "Red Army" was the ally of Soviet Russia and was advancing to liberate the Armenian people from the hated Dashnak oppressors. Karabekir cleverly took advantage of that propaganda by having his troops wear red insignias and advance on Kars under red banners. He declared to his ranking officers on October 29 that on the next day, with the help of Allah, the Turkish flag would fly over the highest fort in Kars.⁷²

The pleas of the Armenian government, its representatives abroad, and scores of Armenophile societies for the world powers at this last moment to come to the defense of Armenia were of no avail. As usual, countless well-crafted but useless speeches were heard in various forums and from the podium of the League of Nations. Equally futile were the appeals to Soviet Russia to honor its declarations about the rights of the Armenian people, even though there was clear evidence that the Turkish invaders were in receipt of Soviet arms, ammunition, and gold. But neither East nor West could or would stay the hands of Mustafa Kemal Pasha and Kiazim Karabekir Pasha.

Saturday, October 30, 1920, was a cold and gloomy day at Kars. The Armenian troops had drawn into the inner forts, with many men abandoning the ranks to try to save their families. All seemed calm, but

⁷¹ Hovhannes Sahakian, "Erku tari haikakan banakin mej" [Two Years in the Armenian Army], in *Ejer mer azatagrakan patmutenen* [Pages from the History of Our Liberation Movement] (Paris: Hay Kamavorneru ev Martikneru Miutun, 1937), pp. 105-15; Hovannisian, *Republic of Armenia*, vol. 4, pp. 247-53; *Doğu Cephesi*, p. 190.

⁷² *Doğu Cephesi*, pp. 195-97; *Harb Tarihi Vesikaları Dergisi*, № 1149.

at 10 o'clock in the morning, telegraph and telephone communications were cut from the rear. After having delayed the operation for three days because of greater resistance than expected near the road and railroad to Alexandropol, Karabekir now ordered a full-scale assault on the fortress. There was still a little fighting spirit left among some of the Armenian troops who slowed the Turkish advance, but by noon Turkish uniforms were spotted on the commanding height of Fort Lazarev. The civilian population was thrown into chaos, as thousands of people came under a hail of fire when they tried to cross over the Kars River to get onto the road to Alexandropol. A few final volleys were heard from the Armenian artillery before everything fell silent, and the troops joined the civilian population in disorganized flight. By noon, General Pirumian understood that he had no choice but to surrender in return for a pledge of no punitive action against the civilian population and of treatment of the men under arms as prisoners of war as stipulated in international conventions. At 1 o'clock in the afternoon, Pirumian dispatched his final message: "The fate of the fortress is sealed."⁷³

Among those taken prisoner by Karabekir Pasha that day were generals Pirumian, Ghazarian, and Araratian, numerous ranking officers, the entire 5th Regiment, Minister of Welfare Artashes Babalian, Bishop Garegin Hovsepien, and Mayor Hamazasp Norhatian, who along with several others was hanged on Karabekir's orders. Aside from the 500 Armenian soldiers killed and 1,000 wounded during the final Turkish campaign, about 2,000 officers and enlisted men were sent to Erzerum for hard labor until those fortunate enough to survive the harsh treatment were finally released months later. The Turkish victors also took possession of huge stores of military supplies, including most of the shipment of rifles and ammunition that had arrived very belatedly from Great Britain. Still, because the 9th Division had failed to close the escape hatch, most of the remaining Armenian troops and the civilian population were able to escape over the Russian villages of Blagodarnoe and Prokhladnoe toward Alexandropol.⁷⁴

⁷³ *Doğu Cephesi*, pp. 197-201; Babalian, "Karsi ankume," pp. 62-63; Hovannisian, *Republic of Armenia*, vol. 4, pp. 253-59.

⁷⁴ FO 371/4962, E13827/134/58; Babalian, "Karsi ankume" (April-May 1924), pp. 54-65, 96-112; *Doğu Cephesi*, pp. 201-02. Karabekir, *İstiklal Harbimiz*, p. 102, states that in October 1921, 98 Armenian officers and 531 enlisted men were returned to Armenia.

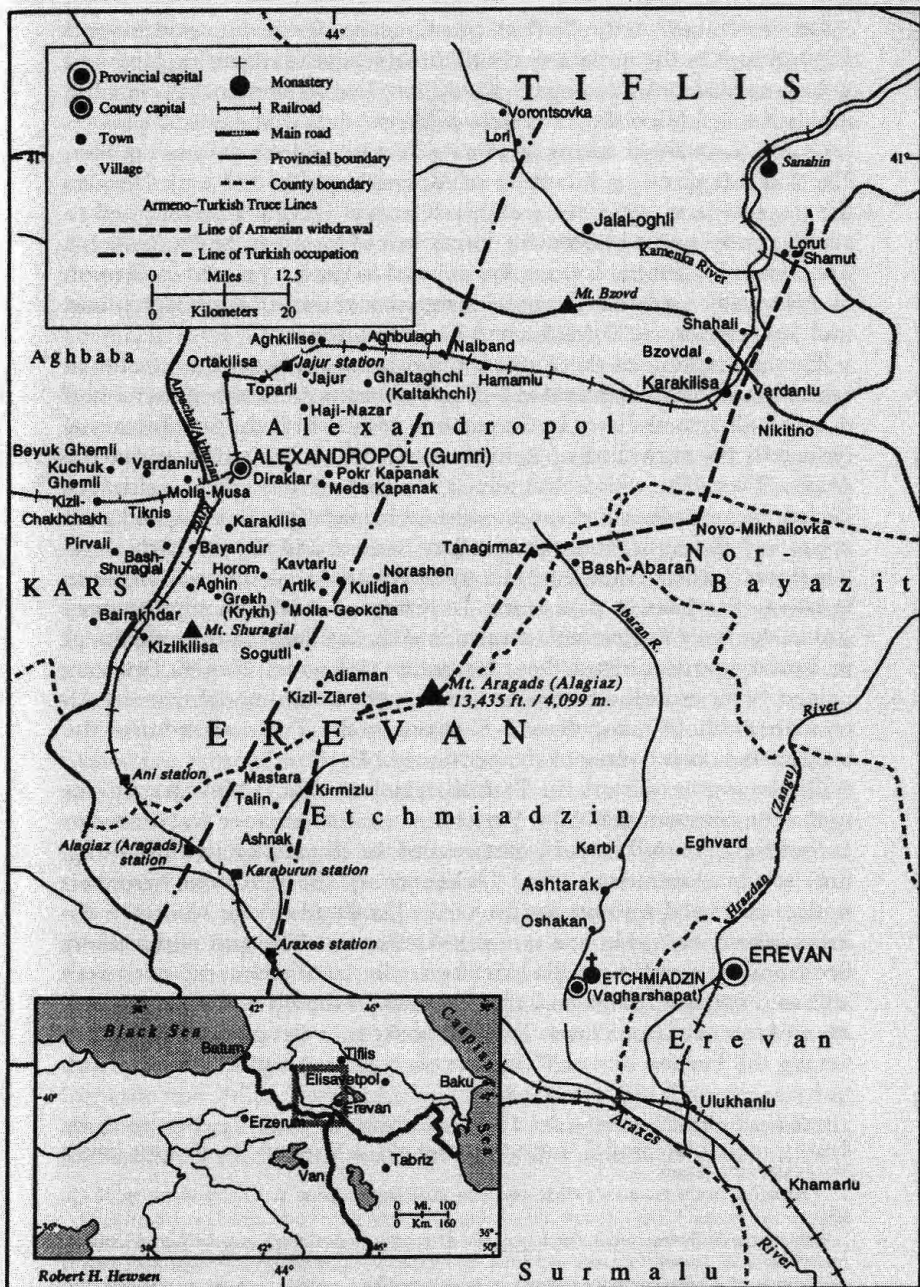
On the afternoon of October 30, General Karabekir rode triumphantly into Kars and telegraphed Ankara the news of his momentous victory. Kemal replied by showering praise on the army commander, his officers, and heroic men. On November 2, Karabekir addressed a circular to the Armenian inhabitants, offering them safety but demanding compliance with all his directives. This war had been waged against the Dashnak regime, not against the people, but severe punishment would be in store for all traitors, spies, and those hiding Armenian soldiers.⁷⁵ On the Armenian side, it would take a long time to comprehend fully what had happened and to attempt to fix the causes and the blame, which included incompetence and divisiveness of the Armenian command; lack of cohesion between officers and enlisted men and between Western Armenian partisans and Eastern Armenian regulars; demoralization resulting from the May uprising and defeatist Bolshevik propaganda; lack of time and training to become accustomed to heavy Canadian Ross rifles delivered by the British after numerous delays; failure to seize the initiative and engage in well-directed offensive operations; irregularities in communication and transportation; the landlocked, vulnerable position of the country which necessitated the dispersal of the armed forces all around the borders; and superiority of the enemy in terms of command, numbers, discipline, and determination.

The Final Collapse

The second phase of the Armenian-Turkish war ended with the fall of Kars. The third phase entailed the occupation of the rest of the province up to the Akhurian River and the overthrow of the Armenian government. On October 31, Chief of Staff Ismet Bey ciphered Karabekir that the military victory at Kars should be used to advance the objectives of the Turkish Nationalist movement. It was vital to eliminate Armenia in a military sense before the two sides sat down at the conference table where the victor would dictate the terms of peace.

The day after the loss of the fortress, the disorganized Armenian troops reached Kizil-Chakhchakh. Only Sebouh's detachments from Ardahan withdrew in full order. In a feeble effort to make a stand with the remaining Armenian troops, Sebouh took up positions on the

⁷⁵ Karabekir, *İstiklal Harbimiz*, pp. 897-98; *Harb Tarihi Vesikalari Dergisi*, № 1145.



The Alexandropol Front, November 1920

slopes of Buyuk and Kuchuk Ghemli and Vardanlu; components of the 1st and 7th regiments and Colonel Hasan Pashayan's 2d Regiment, which had just arrived from the southern front, held the center near the railroad, and Colonel Dmitrii Korganian's cavalry battalions and Sasuntsi Mushegh's Western Armenian partisans manned the left flank. But it was too late, as desertions continued in the ranks, spreading the pandemonium to the civilian population in nearby Alexandropol. The Turkish 9th and 12th divisions marched eastward out of Kars on November 3. Two days later, the half-hearted Armenian resistance at Kizil-Chakhchakh collapsed and the depleted regiments pulled back across the Arpachai River. In preparation for the worst, General Silikian transferred his headquarters from Alexandropol to Jajur on the road to Karakilisa.⁷⁶

By this time, the Armenian government desperately sought a cease fire. On November 3, Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Hamazasp Ohanjanian telegraphed the Grand National Assembly with conciliatory expressions of the desire to live in peace but also of surprise at the unprovoked Turkish advance. The next day, Commander-in-Chief Nazarbekian instructed Silikian to request a cease fire from the Turkish commander. Even as these messages were dispatched and eventually answered, the Turkish offensive continued, now into the province of Erevan itself with the occupation of Alexandropol on November 7 and further advances along the Alexandropol-Karakilisa and Alexandropol-Erevan railway. Once more, a triumphant Kiazim Karabekir rode into Alexandropol on November 8.⁷⁷

The Turkish terms for peace were staggering in a calculated strategy by which the Grand National Assembly voiced sentiments of conciliation and peace while making demands that would render Armenia as vulnerable and dependent as it had been when the Republic was formed in May 1918. Ohanjanian's further correspondence in attempts to lighten the Turkish terms for the sake of good neighborly relations gave Karabekir the excuse to renew the offensive for a week from November 11 to 18, when the Armenian side submitted in abject helplessness. By terms of the truce, the Armenians were to relinquish nearly half of the province of Erevan and withdraw behind a line ex-

⁷⁶ *Doğu Cephesi*, pp. 204-09; Hovannisian, *Republic of Armenia*, vol. 4, pp. 261-65.

⁷⁷ Vratzian, *Hayastani Hanrapetutian*, pp. 501-03; Rep. of Arm. Del. Archives, Files 11/11 and 17/17.

tending from the Arax railway station to Mount Aragats, Bash-Abaran, Novo-Mikhailovka, and Shamut. A demilitarized zone of 30 kilometers was to separate the two armies, although the Armenian civil administration and gendarmerie were allowed to continue to function in the zone. Great quantities of arms, ammunition, and other military matériel had to be delivered to the Turkish command within a very short specified time.⁷⁸

As Ohanjanian's Bureau Government prepared to relinquish power to a new cabinet charged with securing the best possible peace terms, Soviet representative Boris Legran exhorted the Armenians to save themselves by proclaiming a Soviet government, which could then rely on the effective intervention of Moscow and the Red Army. In the short tenure of Simon Vratzian as prime minister, such an accord was signed between the two sides, whereby there would be a peaceful transfer of power and establishment of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Armenia. Aside from a pledge not to take retaliatory measures against the Armenian political leaders and army personnel for their previous persecution of Bolsheviks and resistance to the Red Army, Soviet Russia recognized the boundaries of Armenia as they had been prior to the beginning of the Turkish offensive in September, meaning an assurance that the allied Turkish armed forces would be pressured to withdraw to the 1914 borders in favor of a revolutionary, anti-imperialist Soviet Armenia. The agreement was signed on December 2, and Vratzian's cabinet peacefully transferred power to the Military Revolutionary Committee of Soviet Armenia.⁷⁹

The declaration of Soviet rule did not solve Armenia's problem. The Red Army in and around Armenia did not have the strength to match the armed forces of General Karabekir, and there was no certainty that Soviet Russia would fulfill its pledge to effect a Turkish withdrawal. For that reason, the Armenian-Turkish negotiations for peace which had begun in Alexandropol on November 25 were not immediately suspended. The Armenian chief delegate, former Prime Minister Alexandre Khatisian, attempted futilely to persuade Karabekir to make minor concessions, such as leaving to Armenia for cultural and sentimental reasons the medieval capital city of Ani on the western rim

⁷⁸ Rep. of Arm. Del. Archives, File 17/17; Hovannisian, *Republic of Armenia*, vol. 4, pp. 475-92. See also FO 371/4963-4966, E14301/E14431/E14541/E14957/E15175/E15520/E15522/E15559/134/58.

⁷⁹ Hovannisian, *Republic of Armenia*, vol. 4, pp. 383-90.

of the Akhurian River. The treaty which was prepared by the Turkish side and in which the Armenian delegation had no input formalized the Turkish annexation of the entire province of Kars and, from Erevan province, the county of Surmalu, in which Mount Ararat loomed up from the plain below, as well as the loss to Azerbaijan of the southern districts of Erevan province from Shahtaght to Nakhichevan and Julfa on the Persian border. The Armenian army was to be reduced to the size of a militia and what was left of Armenia was to become dependent in every way on the good will and forbearance of Turkey.⁸⁰

The establishment of Soviet rule in Erevan on December 2 should have allowed Khatisian to walk away from the negotiations with the excuse that he was no longer authorized to represent Armenia. But faced with Karabekir's threat to advance even deeper into the country and make the terms still worse, he consented to sign the Treaty of Alexandropol in the early morning hours of December 3, 1920, reasoning that the new government of Soviet Armenia could repudiate him and his signature. As it happened, however, Mustafa Kemal skillfully used the technically illegal treaty as the basis for negotiation of a permanent treaty of friendship with Soviet Russia. The reasons for Kemal's ultimate success in gaining recognition of the new boundary from both Soviet Russia and the Allied Powers are beyond the scope of this study, but in the end the Turkish hero was able to outmaneuver all sides. By the Treaty of Moscow on March 16, 1921, Soviet Russia acceded to the eastward expansion of Turkey into the entire province of Kars and the plain of Ararat and even assumed the charge for seeing to it that the recently Sovietized republics of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia enter into an identical accord with the government of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey.⁸¹ This was accomplished through the Treaty of Kars between Turkey and the three Transcaucasian Soviet republics on October 13, 1921.⁸² Armenia emerged as the all around loser, deprived

⁸⁰ Rep. of Arm. Del. Archives, File 11/11; Gotthard Jäschke, *Der türkisch-armenische Friedensvertrag von Gümrü (Alexandropol)*, *Die Welt des Islams*, n.s., 2:1 (1952): 25-46. See also Hovannisian, *Republic of Armenia*, vol. 4, pp. 341-72, 390-98.

⁸¹ Jane Degras, ed., *Soviet Documents on Foreign Policy*, vol. 1 (London, New York, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1951), pp. 237-42; *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR*, vol. 3 (1959), pp. 597-604.

⁸² Degras, *Soviet Documents*, pp. 263-69; *Dokumenty politiki SSSR*, vol. 4 (1960), pp. 176-77, 227-28, 287-88, 292-93, 371-74, 392, 400-04, 420-29, 495-97. See also Karabekir, *İstiklal Harbimiz*, pp. 1000-22.

of Kars and Ardahan, Mount Ararat and much of its fertile plain, and the southern sector of the former Erevan guberniia.

The seven-year contest for Kars from 1914 to 1921 had come to an end. The entire Armenian population of historic Vanand was driven into exile to live with nostalgic memories of the most impressive fortress complex in the Caucasus.